

The **Mercer Boys**
in
Summer Camp

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THE MERCER BOYS IN SUMMER CAMP

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"The Mercer Boys at Woodcrest," "The Mercer Boys
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"The Mercer Boys' Cruise in the Lassic."



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THE MERCER BOYS IN SUMMER CAMP

CHAPTER I

TERRY COMES TO GRIEF

A NUMBER of young men in the gray uniforms which formed the ordinary dress of the cadets at Woodcrest Military Institute stood around the counter in the supply room at the school. It was early in July and the summer encampment was at hand. It was the custom at Woodcrest for the third and second classmen to go to summer camp, while the younger classmen and the seniors went home for their vacation. The score or more of young soldiers who were in the supply room this July afternoon were busy getting their camping uniforms.

During the school year the neat, distinguished gray uniforms were in vogue, but on the encampment the more serviceable campaign uniforms, pat-

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turned after those worn by the United States Army, were required. Each cadet stepped to the counter, gave sizes of his garments to the three cadet clerks, received his uniform equipment, signed for it and then stepped away. The boys were lined up before the counter at the moment.

A tall, red-headed cadet with twinkling eyes and a humorous expression perpetually on his good-natured, freckled face, was at the moment the next one to be waited on. He gave the sizes of his garments and then grinned.

"If it is convenient, I'd like a uniform in a shade to match my hair!" he requested, with a grin. This grin was answered by half a dozen other ones, for Terry Mackson was a great favorite with his classmates in the new second class, into which he and his chums, the Mercer boys, had just graduated.

"We have nothing as red as all that," the cadet clerk grinned, in return. "Would something in deep orange do?"

"Possibly it would, if you are careful to get something that won't conflict with my beauty!" returned the cadet.

"We haven't a thing in stock that would conflict with or detract from your beauty," said the clerk, gravely. "These uniforms are ugly in the extreme,

and I'm sure you won't find them a drawback in the least, Mr. Mackson!"

"Well spoken, my lad!" approved Terry. "Let's have the plainest uniform you have. Natural beauty ennobles whatever enshrines it, so trot out whatever you have!"

"Why bother with a uniform at all?" laughed the cadet clerk. "The colonel and the rest of us will be so busy admiring your looks that we won't notice anything else!"

There was a general laugh at this and at that moment there was a diversion. Dick Rowan, the cadet in charge of the commissary department, stepped to the counter, a frown on his face.

Rowen was a handsome young man with glossy black hair and good looks. He had never been popular with the cadet body, however, for he came of rich parents and bore himself with a haughty air that made him actively disliked. But he was a very capable cadet and was respected though not popular. He had been placed in charge of the commissary department, much to his annoyance, for he considered it beneath him. Rowen was pointing for an officer's commission, and it did not please him to be "dud chucker," as the cadets called the commissary clerks. All day the endless routine of passing out uniforms, blouses, hats and shoes had galled

him, and at the present moment his temper was ragged.

"What is the trouble here?" Cadet Rowen demanded crisply.

The clerk who was waiting on Terry turned to stare at him. "There is no trouble, Rowen," he said.

Rowen looked across the counter at Terry. "Is there any trouble, Mr. Mackson?"

Terry shook his head gravely. "No, Mr. Rowen. I am simply trying to draw a uniform that will match my beauty, that is all!"

Rowen frowned more deeply. "Have the goodness to understand, Mr. Mackson, that we are very busy here, and that such infant's prattle merely wastes our time!"

"All right, Papa!" returned Terry, sedately. The others snickered and Rowen grew angry.

"Please don't be funny, Mackson! That comes natural to some people, and others work hard all their lives without ever managing to ever be really humorous!"

Terry turned to the others back of him. "Gentlemen," he observed. "Mr. Rowen has turned philosopher! Some of you fellows are naturally funny, ask Mr. Rowen!"

A dull red flush mounted in the other's cheeks.

"How long are you going to waste our time?"

"My dear, good man!" exclaimed the red-head. "If I am not mistaken, you are wasting your own time! Here I am, waiting with the patience of an angel for my uniform, and are you getting it? No, twenty times no! Don't you know that time wasted can never be recovered, Mr. Rowen?"

"I'll tell you what I do know!" Rowen fairly hissed. "I know that you and those Mercer brothers are too confounded stuck on yourselves! You are the colonel's own particular pets!"

"Well, well, the Mercer brothers get a tongue lashing, too!" commented a brown-haired, good-looking youth back of Terry. "Brother Don, weep on my shoulder!"

"I cry better out doors," grinned Don Mercer, back of his brother Jim. "My, my, how distressing this conversation is getting!"

"You are making us feel dreadful, really, Mr. Rowen!" Terry told the clerk, mournfully. At the laugh that went up Rowen lost his temper.

"I'll make you feel dreadful, all right," snapped the disagreeable cadet, and before anyone could guess as to his purpose he hit Terry a slight tap on the point of the jaw, knocking him to the floor.

There was a moment of hushed expectancy while Terry stared up at the supply clerk in surprise.

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Most of the good-natured grin had faded from his face, and a slight redness had suffused his cheeks. With a suddenness that was ominous he jumped to his feet. But at that moment Colonel Morrell walked into the office.

Colonel Morrell was a little fat man with gray hair, laughing gray eyes, and the air of a real man's man about him. By the cadet corps he was beloved greatly, and to a man they respected him thoroughly. His keen eye swept over the cadets and he noted that something unusual was in the wind, but with the rare judgment that made him so popular with the cadets he made no comment on it.

"Is everything going smoothly?" he asked the nearest clerk.

"Yes, sir," answered the cadet, saluting. The colonel returned the salute, turned on his heel, and left the room. They heard his footsteps echo down the hall.

"Now, Mr. Rowen," murmured Terry. "This is what you need most of all!"

With that he reached over the counter and seized the unprepared cadet by the collar, hauling him bodily over the counter. Rowen was unprepared for the act and flopped across the boards, his head hanging over the side. Although he struggled

furiously Terry managed to hold him down while he administered a sound spanking to the surly one. Then he pushed him backward. The assembled cadets had enjoyed every moment of it.

"That's for you," said Terry, unheeding the gasping sputtering of the other. "If you act like a baby someone will have to play papa and spank you! I happened to be the nearest one. Next time you be careful who you punch on the jaw. It might be somebody who'll lose their temper and muss you up!"

"You—you red-headed calf!" cried the enraged Rowen. "I've—I've half a mind to call you out!"

"Well, if you have half a mind, that means that your whole mind is busy on the one subject, because sometimes I think you have only half a mind. Now, you're wasting my time! One uniform, if you don't mind!"

With very bad grace the uniform was handed over to him and the line moved on. As Terry stepped away Rowen spoke to him between half-shut teeth.

"I'll fix you for this yet, Mackson!"

"Thank you," bowed Terry. "I always knew I needed fixing! Sometime we'll get together and talk it over!"

Jim Mercer halted at the counter. "Was there

some complaint about the Mercer brothers, Rowen?" he asked quietly.

"I just said that you two were the colonel's pets," replied the clerk. "Just because you two once helped the colonel out of a mess he bows down before you."

"With all due respect to the colonel," drawled Don Mercer. "He is a little too fat to bow down! Better go soak your head until you feel better, Dick!"

"Aw, you fellows give me a pain!" roared the clerk.

Terry impishly picked up the telephone, carefully holding down the hook. "Hello, is this the nurse in charge of the medical department?" he spoke into the transmitter. "If you have time I wish you'd step down to the commissary department. Mr. Rowen has a very bad pain. I beg your pardon? Oh, it seems to be a Mackson-Mercer pain, if you know what that is! It seems to be——"

Laughing, Jim Mercer caught him by the arm. "Come on, get out of here, you!" he admonished his chum. "Come on up to the room!"

The three boys were devoted chums, having been friends from the days of their childhood. They had been in many scrapes and adventures together, sharing their fun and dangers on land and sea. In

the first volume of this series, *THE MERCER BOYS' CRUISE IN THE LASSIE*, they had gone on a long cruise, and from there they had come to Woodcrest, their fun and adventure at that time being related in *THE MERCER BOYS AT WOODCREST*. On their following summer vacation they had encountered some strange events in *THE MERCER BOYS ON A TREASURE HUNT* and later on had worked together on a school mystery, details of which will be found in *THE MERCER BOYS' MYSTERY CASE*. Early in the spring of that same year the boys had faced a man's task on the Massachusetts coast, all of which will be found in the fifth volume, *THE MERCER BOYS ON THE BEACH PATROL*. Now, after a few months of uneventful school life they were preparing for their first encampment.

Once in their own room the three boys hung up the new uniforms, preparatory to donning them the first thing in the morning. There were no lessons and they had nothing to do except wait until the morrow, when they would set off for the life in the open. All of the boys looked forward eagerly to it.

"I hear that we are going to a new camping ground this year," Jim said, as he sat on the edge of his bed. "Rustling Ridge, they call it."

"Yes," nodded Don. "Up until the present time

they have always held the encampment at Perryville, but the colonel hunted up new grounds this time. I heard that there had been quite a bit of building going on near the old camping ground and the colonel wants to get as far away from civilization as he can."

"Rustling Ridge is none too far, at that," observed Terry.

"No, it isn't," agreed Jim. "But it is far enough away to keep a lot of curious people out of the camp when we are busy. Even the colonel doesn't know much about this new location."

"About thirty miles from here, isn't it?" Don asked.

"I heard that it was," returned Terry. "Well, the whole outlook suits me perfectly. I wouldn't have known what to do with myself this vacation, anyway."

"It is very probable that you would have been invited to go on a cruise with us," Don suggested. "We haven't been sailing on the good old *Lassie* for so long that I'm afraid I've forgotten how to manage it!"

"Camping might bring us some good adventures," Jim put in. Don shrugged his shoulders.

"I rather doubt that. What adventures can we run across on a camping trip? We'll have a lot

of fun, I grant you that, but I don't look for anything out of the way. We'll be mighty busy drilling and practising all sorts of tactics."

"We might have some excitement with Mr. Rowen!" Terry grinned.

"Rowen is a natural sorehead," said Don briefly. "The best thing we can do is to let him alone. That kind isn't made any better by stirring up, and he isn't worth getting into trouble over. We can just be decent to him and let it go at that."

"True for you," nodded Terry.

Supper that night was a slightly unruly affair, tempered only by the presence of the colonel and the other officers. The young soldiers themselves were in high spirits and it took all their will power to refrain from manifesting it to the great harm of the bread and butter. The only incident that occurred concerned a square of jelly and the neck of Second Classman Vench. The square of jelly hit him on the neck and slipped down his collar, causing him to wriggle and turn around.

"Who in thunder threw that?" the little cadet muttered.

No one appeared to know and the colonel studied his plate intently. Terry hastily smoothed over his jelly and went on eating.

Rowen was at another table and after the meal

he went into conference with his two room-mates, young men who had borrowed from the unpopular cadet and who therefore felt themselves under obligations to him. What went on in that conference was not designed for Terry Mackson's peace.

When the orders of the day were read that evening all cadets were commanded to be in place at bugle call in the morning, with full equipment and ready to march. It was announced that swift and sure punishment would follow for the one who failed to obey that order, and no excuses would be accepted. With this understanding in mind the cadets went to bed to get a good sleep for the following day.

When the bugle sounded on the next morning the cadets sprang from bed, dressed and partook of a hearty meal. There was still some half hour before assembly and the cadets were at leisure. Just as Terry was turning away from the table a member of the kitchen force approached him. In his hand he had a note.

"This for you, Mr. Mackson," he said.

"Thanks, Pete," said Terry, accepting the note. "Who gave it to you?"

"Jack Olson," replied the cook. "He said Captain Rush gave it to him, but he didn't have time

to give it to you himself, so he gave me a quarter to give the letter to you."

Terry nodded and read the note. Captain Rush was the leader of the artillery division to which Terry belonged. The note was brief and to the point.

"Mr. Mackson:

Go to the storage room in the barn and get out the extra harness that you will find there.

Signed,
RUSH, Captain."

"Funny he didn't tell me, instead of sending me a note," reflected Terry. "Well, orders are orders, and I'm ready as it is. I'll go out there now."

He made his way to the barn, finding it empty of life. He knew that there was a small storage room at one side of the structure and he made his way to it, opening the door and peering in. There was a pile of harness on the floor and he went toward it.

At that moment the door back of him closed with a bang. A bolt on the outside was shot at the same moment. Terry hastened to the door, pushing against it.

"Hey!" he shouted. "Open this door, whoever you are!"

His only answer was the sound of retreating footsteps and the point of it all came to him in a rush. He kicked against the door, finding it solid and then looked around the cell. But there was no window and no opening of any kind.

"Tumbled right into the trap!" he groaned, grinding his teeth. "If I don't get out of here before assembly it will be all up with me!"

CHAPTER II

.THE "GOSSIP" RUNS WILD

THE whole trick was clear to him now. In the general orders of the day, read to the cadets on the previous day, the fact that no excuse would be accepted had been sternly emphasized. Terry was not the kind who would carry tales even if he thought they would do him any excuse and win him sympathy, and as he realized how deeply fooled he had been his eyes flashed with wrathful fire.

"I see the whole business, now," he reflected. "Jack Olson is a crony of Rowen's, and he carried that note supposedly signed by Rush. They know I won't tell Rush about it, and there isn't any use in thumping Olson, because he probably had to take his orders from Rowen. But if I get my hands on that surly gentleman I'll make him dance a merry tune!"

Realizing that every moment counted in his task the red-headed youth looked around the small room, his eyes having grown used to the darkness. He hoped that there might be some instrument that

would make it possible for him to pry up a board and so make his escape, but the only thing in sight was the pile of harness. There was not even a piece of metal on the harness and although he examined every corner of the little cell he was unable to find a single object that would aid him.

"Guess I'll just have to use my hands and feet, if that will do any good," he reflected.

Dropping on his hands and knees he examined the floor patiently to see if any of the boards were loose, but all of them were securely fastened to the huge beams that made up the framework of the barn. All of these boards were very thick and any thought of escaping under the barn was out of the question. From there he went to the door, feeling carefully along the sides to see if any signs of weakness existed here, but once again he was doomed to disappointment. Like the rest of the barn the door and the frame had been strongly constructed and it did not even quiver under his hearty kicks.

"About the only thing I can do—if I can do it—is to kick a board off of the side of the wall," he decided.

With this thought in mind he raised his foot, but allowed it to remain poised as a sound reached his ears, a sound that made his blood chill.

With a clarity and snap the call of assembly rang out on the morning air!

"Good night!" groaned Terry, the sweat breaking out on his forehead. "There goes the call to assemble! If I'm ever going to get out of here in time, now is the moment!"

With desperation Terry kicked stoutly at the wall boards, but with the first kick the bitter truth was forced upon him. The sides of the barn were as strongly composed as the rest of the building, and all the kicking in the world would not get him out of the room in which he was held prisoner. To further worry him certain sounds told him that the process of assembly was going forward rapidly.

Doors slammed, running footsteps sounded on the parade grounds, voices rang out as the assembling cadets gathered. The butt of a rifle cracked on the pavement, and the noise of stamping horses reached his ears. The cavalrymen, of which Jim Mercer was the chief, were leading out the spirited mounts, and the creaking of leather, the snorts of the horses, and the cries of the young soldiers, reached the ears of the unfortunate young cadet. Hoping to attract their attention he pounded and yelled at the top of his voice, but no response came back to him. The noise of preparation prevented his signals from being heard.

Closer at hand there was a deeper rumble and Terry groaned in spirit. It was the members of his own division, the artillery, taking out the field guns that they were to take with them for the summer practise. He was the chief gunner on the sleek steel monster which he had named the "Gossip" and he knew that the others of his crew must be wondering where he was. Just as soon as the guns were in formation and the roll call sounded he would be officially marked absent from official duty and held guilty of disobeying orders. As he heard the guns roll out of the barracks and heard the noise of the harnessing he knew that it was all up with him.

From the barracks to the parade ground there was a slight hill and the horses began to pull the weapons up the grade. He heard them go up one by one and then something seemed to go wrong. There was a snap, a rumble and somebody cried out.

"Look out!" he heard Captain Rush bellow. "Number One gun is loose!"

Number one gun was Terry's own piece of equipment. From the cries that arose he gathered that the gun had broken from the harness and was rolling down the hill. There was an increasing rumble that seemed suddenly close at hand, and before his

brain had time to realize what had happened there was a tremendous crash, the boards of his cell burst open like matchwood, and the butt of the "Gossip" halted a scant foot from his stomach!

For a single instant Terry was stunned. The sudden glare of morning sunlight smote his eyes with a force that made him blink, the dust filled his mouth and set him to coughing, and the echoes of the crash remained in his ears. But it did not take him long to gain his composure and spring forward. He placed affectionate hands on the gun.

"Good old 'Gossip,' " he whooped. "You wouldn't go on parade without your boy friend, would you? Talk about luck!"

A half dozen artillerymen appeared at the opening, led by Captain Rush. At the sight of Terry they halted and stared in amazement.

"Where have you been?" Cadet Emerson, Terry's mate, shouted.

"Waiting for the old 'Gossip' to let me out!" retorted Terry, gleefully.

Rush approached him. "Where have you been, Mr. Mackson?" he inquired.

"Someone locked me in here and I couldn't get out, captain," returned Terry.

"Then the accident was a very fortunate one for you," nodded the captain. He turned to the young

artillerymen. "Lively, gentlemen! We have only a very few minutes to make the parade grounds. Snap to it!"

Terry threw himself into the work, rejoicing in the chance to become active. The horses were backed down the hill and the broken harness was stripped from them, new material being substituted like lightning. A loose pin was driven into the shaft and when the "Gossip" was harnessed it was drawn up to the top of the hill in safety and wheeled swiftly into position. And on the rear box sat Terry, happy as a lark.

When his name was called he answered brightly, stealing a look across the parade ground to the infantry, where Rowen stood in the second rank. The face of the sullen one was a study in amazement.

In accordance with previous instructions the cavalry swung out first, taking the long dusty road that led to the section of country in which lay Rustling Ridge. Next in line marched the infantry and the artillery rumbled in the rear. Terry sat on his gun, happy and thankful for the good fortune he had had. He smiled frequently, but there was a grim set to his jaw nevertheless.

All through the morning they marched and it was noon before they paused to make temporary

camp. Just as soon as the long column came to a halt and broke up Terry made his way to where Rowen and his few friends sat on a grassy bank. He halted directly in front of the other.

"Didn't work, did it?" Terry asked.

Rowen looked at him with a haughty frown. "I don't know what you are talking about," he said.

"Yes, you do. Your plan to lock me in the barn until I was late for camp didn't turn out very well, did it?"

"I don't know anything about it, and you can't prove that I do," snapped the dark-haired boy.

"Don't be silly!" growled Terry. "I can do that easily. All I have to do is to give that little sneak Jack Olson a good, stiff beating and he'll tell. Look at how pale he is! Or I can ask Captain Rush about it and we'd have you in a fine mess. But I don't intend to do anything like that, Rowen, and you know it. I would have been in mighty poor standing with my captain if I had been late for encampment, and you figured on that. Now, look here! Just one piece of freshness out of you from now on and without even bothering to call you out in the approved style—which is for gentlemen only—I'll give you the peachiest licking you ever saw, right in front of the cadet corps. When they see that happen they'll know that you have done some-

thing so mean and low-down that I won't even bother to challenge you in the approved way. Don't forget it, my friend!"

Turning on his heel Terry walked off, his eyes dancing slightly. There was no word spoken by the ones back of him, and perhaps it was just as well. The red-head was dynamite and ready to go.

In that brief period he encountered Don. Jim was far ahead with the supply corps but Don, who was a lieutenant in the infantry, was close at hand. He was delighted to see his chum.

"Where in the world were you at assembly?" Don demanded. "Jim and I nearly turned the building upside down looking for you."

Terry explained briefly and Don approved of his recent charge to Rowen. "That fellow bids fair to become a bad actor," said Don. "You couldn't exactly call him a bully, because he isn't big enough or strong enough, but his surly nature makes him anything but trustworthy. If you had been several days late for the encampment it would have given you a black eye with the corps for a long time. As far as that goes, you might have been a prisoner in that storage room for a long time."

"That's right," agreed Terry. "And to anyone who likes to eat as well as I do that would have meant something!"

After an afternoon of leisurely marching the cadets came to an open meadow where the cavalry and the supply corps had set up tents. Here they spent the night, sleeping soundly until morning. They turned in soon after the evening meal, no fooling being permitted, and in the morning, strengthened and refreshed, they pushed on to Rustling Ridge, arriving there about noon time.

Rustling Ridge was a long slope that rose gradually from a flat meadow. It was in the heart of a truly delightful country, and far and wide, solitary farmhouses could be seen. Close beside the camp there was a deep swimming hole, which the cadets welcomed with unrestrained delight. The camp itself was pitched in a grove about a quarter way up the slope, the white tents rising in somewhat irregular lines between the trees. The wide glades on either side of the camp permitted the creation of natural centers for the horses and the supply wagons and guns. By mid-afternoon the camp was in first class order and the tired cadets enjoyed their first swim in the nearby swimming hole.

Supper was greatly enjoyed and afterward large fires were lighted. But the cadets did not linger long around them. Even before taps many of them had sought their cots, falling asleep as soon as they

crawled in between their blankets. Sentries were posted and soon the camp was quiet except for the stamping of horses and the rustling tramp of the sentries.

CHAPTER III

AT RUSTLING RIDGE

THE clear, thrilling strains of the bugle made scores of cadets cordially hate Bugler Howes on the following morning. Many a young soldier considered defying orders and sleeping on in peace and comfort, but wisdom prevailed in the long run. With a snap and many groans the camp came to life.

"Oh, boy!" sighed Terry, casting his blankets to one side. "I never felt less like getting up in all my life!"

"I don't see why you or Jim should kick," Don said, as he pulled on his clothes. "You two rode out here but I had to foot it all the way!"

"I'm tired just the same," said Terry.

But once awake the cadets became alive to the glories of the camp life. A rush was made to the nearby brook, where they washed and then dressing was speedily finished. Before long they had fallen in for inspection, the reading of orders, and the march to breakfast.

A long tent had been erected for meals when

the weather would compel them to eat indoors, but during the clear and warm weather they were permitted to eat outside around the kitchen tent. After a hearty breakfast had been put away there was a brief period before the actual work began.

Before long they were all hard at work. On a flat plain at the bottom of the hill they were all required to drill and take routine exercises during the morning. This took up their time until the noon meal, which was enjoyed even more than the breakfast had been. Then, in the afternoon, the units took up the tactics of their own particular division. The infantry was busy that day with setting up range targets for practise in the near future. After that was over they worked steadily fixing the camp more solidly than it had been at first. Tents were made more inviting by the addition of wooden floors, pegs were put in with a view toward real strength and service, and trenches were dug so as to carry off the rain water when it fell from the sloping canvas. A permanent kitchen was constructed and the long tables for the mess tent were built and put in place. Benches then were hammered into place along the tables, the wagons set in proper formation, and the camp looked vastly improved.

The cavalry escaped this task but was busy with tactics of its own. Under Jim, who was its chief, it was required to drill and go for a trot across the

country. That used up most of the afternoon and the sun was beginning to sink when they returned. At school, during the term, the cavalrymen got quite a bit of practise, but it was the plan of the colonel to teach his boys to ride every day during the encampment, so that they might become used to having horses under them a good many hours at a stretch. Some of the boys were surprised at the result in the long run. Some who had considered themselves expert riders found it vastly different to ride a horse for an hour or more at the school and to ride the same animal for hours during the encampment. Many a young man found himself stiff and sore before the end of the week.

The artillery was busy with what they called "silent drill." Artillery practise was always pretty expensive and only during the fall and the last few weeks of summer encampment did the colonel allow any firing of the field pieces. During the summer the artillerymen were instructed in the art of finding the range, wheeling the guns into position, effectively concealing them from an enemy, especially an enemy in the air, and harnessing and unharnessing the guns. Practise in practical placing of the pieces, digging pits for artillery, and sighting soon made the soldiers proficient and took up their time.

All of this took up time and the first day in camp sped by with astonishing rapidity. Just before sunset

there was a period of rest and then the evening meal was in order. That meal proved real work for the kitchen unit. The cadets ate like hungry wolves and felt a new health flowing over them, together with a feeling of tiredness that made many of them seek early beds. This first day was different than the ones that followed, for once the camp was settled the work decreased materially. So busy had the boys been that there was no time for a swim or any fun on that initial day of camp life. A few hardy souls managed to stay awake and talk and sing songs around the camp fires, but most of the young men stumbled to bed at the first possible moment.

The three chums had not had much of a chance to see each other that day, and at night they were too tired to do much in the way of talking. In common with many others they sought their beds before taps.

"If I'm going to be as tired as this every night I'll never enjoy this camping trip," Jim grumbled as he undressed.

"You won't be," Don observed. "This was an unusual day for all of us, but we'll get used to it. With all our outdoor life, this systematic drill, exercise and work makes us feel the grind."

"I don't see why we have to take regular exercises," yawned Terry, stretched out on his cot.

"Seems to me that we get enough to keep us physically fit as it is."

"Yes, but the kind of routine exercises that we get help to keep us limbered up," Don returned. "Otherwise, we'd get a whole lot of one kind of training and not much of another. You and I get plenty of leg and arm exercise but Jim would be riding all day if he stuck to his particular branch of the corps."

"That's true," agreed Terry. "Well, I suppose the colonel and the officers know what we need most of. If anybody asked me right now, though, I'd say it was sleep."

On the second day things appeared to come more easily to the active young soldiers. At first, stiff and sore muscles cried out in protest and glum faces characterized the corps. But as the day went on their hearts cheered and slowly the joy of the camping life grew in their minds and hearts.

That afternoon they finished drill and manoeuvres at three o'clock and from then on the time was their own. A dozen games of baseball were quickly organized but most of the boys preferred to make a rush for the big swimming hole formed by a loop in the nearby brook. Before many minutes a score of the boys splashed in.

A few officers with the colonel had gone to Rustling Ridge some weeks earlier and made arrange-

ments with local authorities for the camping grounds. In looking over the ground the colonel had selected that spot because of the bend in the brook, and now the boys were able to enjoy the fruits of the headmaster's foresight. One cadet had dropped in to test the depth of the stream, and finding that it was up to the average boy's shoulder at the bank, and about ten feet deep in the center, a number of boys had dived joyfully in. Don and Terry were among the first, with Jim following a little later.

The brook was a large stream, running down from the top of the Ridge, fed by springs at the source. The chill of the water was somewhat tempered by the fact that for goodly distances it ran in reach of the summer sun and by the time it came to the cadet's camp the sharp edge of it had been taken off. But it was still sufficiently cool to stir them to vigorous efforts as they swam up and down the stretch of some score of yards.

"This is a dandy pool," gasped Jim, shaking the water from his eyes and floating close beside Don. "I like snappy fresh water even better than I do the salt water."

"I don't," returned his brother. "I like the rush and the sting of the green sea water. But this woodland water makes you work to keep afloat."

There was no springboard and the cadets were diving from the bank. In time this proved disap-

pointing. As they clambered up the sides, the water running in streams from their dripping bathing suits, the bank became muddy, and then dangerously slippery. More than one sloppy fall discolored a suit and caused gleeful laughter, until a few cadets ran into camp, brought out some long boards and some thick supports, and in a very short time a fairly good diving board had been placed on the bank.

"This is some improvement," smiled Harry Douglas, as he tried the board out.

The diving then became general and was enjoyed. One of the best divers was Dick Rowen. His summers had been spent largely in summer resorts where swimming was the principal attraction and he had become quite expert at it. Knowing that the eyes of many of his comrades were upon him Rowen essayed to perform a good many fancy dives, all of which were very well done. He jack-knifed, sailor-dived, swan-dived, cannon-balled and threw fancy flips. His back dives were gems. Some of the cadets, with quiet generosity, complimented him upon his prowess.

"Oh, diving comes easily to me," answered Rowen, poising for another, in answer to a word of praise from a cadet. "This is one of my best."

He jumped to the springboard, attempted to turn around and over, but his twist did not work and his feet slipped. Truth to tell, the cadets were

growing tired of his posing and a delighted shout went up as he slapped the water with a sound that echoed over the camp.

Thoroughly angry Rowen bobbed up out of the water and scrambled ashore, turning a resentful ear to the good-natured teasing of his mates. Jim was the next one to follow Rowen out on the board, and he prepared for his dive.

"Going to give us an exhibition of your best dive, Jim?" Cadet Vench called out, laughingly.

Jim grinned. "Yes, this is my best," he answered, and sprang away. But his foot slipped and he hit the water in the same way that Rowen had. Instantly a roar of laughter went up and Rowen's face flushed a dull red.

Jim made his way out of the water. "That wasn't so good at that," he remarked, as he gained the bank. Then he came face to face with Rowen. The look on the face of the sullen one attracted his attention.

"Think you are pretty smart, don't you, Mercer?" hissed the cadet.

Jim looked surprised. "Why, no, not especially. Not after that dive, anyway. What do you mean, Dick?"

"Don't call me Dick!" snapped Rowen. "I'm only Dick to my friends, and that doesn't include you. I

said you think you're funny because you ridiculed me in that dive!"

"Oh, don't be silly!" retorted Jim. "I had no intention of imitating you, Rowen. My foot honestly slipped, that is all."

"I don't believe you, Mercer," said Rowen, at a white heat.

There was a moment's pause and the gathered cadets looked on with interest. Jim's jaw had set and he thought a moment before replying.

"Listen, Mr. Rowen," he said, when he had gained sufficient control of himself. "I want you to understand one thing. I only joke with a man who is enough of a man to take a joke. Under the rules of the school I ought to call you out for doubting the words of a gentleman, but I don't consider you worth it! If I were picking out anyone to have some fun with I wouldn't pick a sorehead like you. That's pretty plain, but you have it coming to you. As for my not being a friend of yours, Mr. Rowen, that is your own fault."

"Fault!" shrilled Rowen, trembling. "Good night! go chase yourself! Do you think I care that you aren't my friend?"

"Whatever you like," nodded Jim, and turned away from the unpopular boy. Unheeding the statement that "some fellows made him sick" Jim went

back into the water, to enjoy himself and forget the surly one.

That evening the cadets remained up until taps, which came at nine-thirty. A number of fires formed convenient places for them to gather and chat. Just before taps the three chums went to their tents.

"I didn't notice Rowen around tonight," remarked Don, as they began to prepare for bed.

"Might have been sulking in his tent," grinned Terry. "Now, the only thing that remains is for him to pick a fight with you, Don!"

"I don't know if I could be as patient as you two have been," mused Don. "I think I should be tempted to punch his nose for him!"

"Don't worry," smiled Jim, "We were tempted, all right! But I'd like to hold off as long as possible, that is all."

"Who took my bayonet?" questioned Terry, suddenly.

All of the cadets, including the artillerymen and cavalrymen, were required to have guns and bayonets, and Terry had looked aimlessly at his equipment, to note that the bayonet was gone. In a moment Don reported the loss of his.

"Mine's gone, too," announced Jim. "This looks funny to me."

Terry threw the blankets off of his bed. "Not

under the covers," he murmured. "Now, where—oh, ho!"

He dropped to his knees and looked under the cot. Then he reached under and brought out his weapon.

"Look under your cōts," he directed. Don and Jim did so and then uttered a sharp cry together.

"Sticking upright, so that when we lay down on the bed the point would prod us," Don growled.

"And that explains where Mr. Rowen was this evening," guessed Terry.

"Why, this is going a little too far!" cried Jim. "A mighty dangerous trick, that one."

"Well, not especially dangerous," said Don slowly. "The point wasn't in such a position that it would have actually run into us. But he figured that we'd come in just at taps and jump into bed, landing on the points with enough force to make us squirm.

The worst part of it all is that we can't prove who did it."

"From now on," said Terry, his eyes narrowing, "we have got to keep a wary eye on Mr. Rowen."

"Yes," nodded Don. "I guess he placed all three bayonets so that one of the disliked gentlemen would be sure to get it. It would be funny if it had been me, who so far has done nothing to injure Mr. Rowen."

"If I catch him in any funny business I'll sail right into him without loss of time," promised Jim, as they replaced the bayonets in the scabbards.

Taps rang out and the camp quieted down. Without loss of time the three chums drifted off to sleep.

CHAPTER IV

STRANGE TALES FROM THE RIDGE

THREE shots sounded from the east side of the camp. Almost on top of them three shots sounded from a point close to the first series.

With the first shots the three chums stirred and woke up, listening while half asleep. But with the second three shots they came up in their beds, wide awake.

Close at hand the sound of rapidly turning wheels reached their ears, accompanied by the beat of horses' hoofs. Something metallic bumped and banged. A voice called out :

"Corporal of the guard! Post Number Three!"

The boys jumped from their cots with one accord, reaching for necessary articles of clothing.

"Something wrong with the sentries," cried Don.

"Sure enough," returned Jim. "Who is at Number Three post "

"Anderson," answered Terry, fumbling with his shoes.

The camp was in motion. Every cadet was up and hastening to dress. Lights flashed at various

points and voices sounded. Past the tent went running feet. But the bugle did not sound, so they knew that it was not a fire or anything of like nature.

"I'm ready. How about you two?" Don called.

"Right with you," was the response and the three soldiers burst out of the tent.

A central fire was burning and at this point the colonel was standing, half clad and with mussed up hair, his eyes heavy with sleep. The other cadets were clustering around him there, and the sentries were straggling in to that center. Just as the three chums reached the spot the sentries from Number Three and Number Four posts came up and saluted.

Number Three post was at a point up the Ridge and Number Four was right at the edge of camp. The shots from Number Four had followed so closely to those from Number Three that they knew the same thing had caused the act in the case of each sentry.

"Sentries to report, sir," announced the corporal of the guard, saluting.

The colonel saluted and faced the sentries. "Make your report, gentlemen," he ordered.

Anderson, from Number Three post spoke up. "While patrolling my post I heard a wagon coming along that dirt road just above the camp on the Ridge. It appeared to be coming at a great rate

of speed and just as it reached a point above my post it left the road and cut right down through the bushes toward me. It had a man and a boy in it and I challenged them, but without slacking speed a single bit the wagon tore right past me toward the camp. I then fired the shots to warn the camp and the next sentry."

"Very good," nodded the colonel. "Mr. Simms?"

"I heard the shots, though I had heard the thrashing of the wagon previously," spoke up the second sentry. "I turned to find the wagon bearing down on me, swinging from side to side, and with a man and boy hanging onto the seat. It cut straight across the lower end of the camp grounds, down the slope and across the drill grounds. I fired to bear out Mr. Anderson."

"Very good, gentlemen," said the colonel, with a puzzled frown on his forehead. In the momentary silence that followed they could hear the mysterious wagon bumping and banging across the country, apparently at top speed.

Now that the official reports had been given the talk became general. Nothing could be made out of the incident by anyone. Both sentries remarked that the man and boy had been huddled together much as though pretty badly frightened, and the sight of the cadets with guns had not seemed to reassure them any. Neither sentry had been able to see what

had been in the wagon because it had passed them in too great a hurry, but from the sound they judged the rattling to proceed from pots and pans. A single horse had pulled the wagon, which looked to be an ordinary vegetable vehicle.

"Strangest thing I ever heard of," murmured the new senior captain, Henry Jordan.

"I can't figure out why the party in the wagon left the dirt road," said the colonel, to Major Rhodes, the drill instructor. "That road runs parallel with the Ridge and works gradually down to the level of the countryside. For some reason or other that pair in the wagon wanted to get off of the Ridge and out on the open meadow."

"It is possible that they were fleeing from some crime," suggested Rhodes.

"True enough," assented the colonel. "And when they saw the cadets the vision didn't reassure them any. Well, it goes beyond my understanding." He turned once more to the attentive soldiers. "Corporal of the guard, restation the sentries. Everyone back to his bed."

The sentries were reposted and the other cadets straggled back to their cots. Once in their tent Jim looked at his watch.

"A quarter past three," he announced. "Quite an uncanny hour out here in the country. I'll bet there is something behind that wild wagon flight."

"Funny they should cut right across the camp," remarked Don.

"I agree with Rhodes that those fellows were probably fleeing from something like a crime," advanced Terry.

"That may be the explanation," agreed Don. "I can't think of any other reason for such a wild flight. Well, me for some more sleep."

The rest of that night was quiet and in the morning the cadets discussed the event until they became tired of it. The details of the day then took up all of their attention and the night adventure was pushed from their minds.

Late in the afternoon Don and Terry hastened into the tent to get their baseball gloves. Jim was in the tent at the time.

"Going to play some ball?" Terry hailed.

Jim shook his head. "I'm out of luck today," he announced. "Six of us have to go to a nearby farmhouse and buy some eggs and butter."

"That's good!" smiled Terry.

"It is, eh?" asked Jim. "Why is it?"

"I don't mean that it is good you have to miss playing ball, but it looks as though we'll have plenty of fresh food," explained the red-head.

"Yes, I guess we will, for the colonel told me to try and strike a bargain with a farmer for eggs, butter, milk and meat," Jim told them.

"Don't forget to wait for your change after you pay the farmer!" advised Terry.

"Go chase yourself!" flung back Jim. "I guess I know enough for that."

While the other two went off to play ball Jim rounded up his five companions and they set off on horseback for the farmhouses that scattered around the various parts of the Ridge. Two of the farms they passed did not look very promising but at last they came to a neat-looking one which had a large sign on the front fence. This sign announced that chickens, eggs and butter were on sale within, and into this yard the six cavalymen turned their horses. An uproar of barking dogs announced their presence and a farmer appeared, scanning their uniforms with great interest. To him Jim explained their errand.

The farmer was more than pleased by the wind-fall that fortune had brought him and hastened to bring out several dozen fresh eggs and a dozen pounds of butter. In the meantime some children and two farmhands had gathered about the soldiers, staring at them with wide open eyes. When the supplies had been paid for Jim instructed the farmer to come to camp and confer with the colonel concerning future food supplies. The farmer was delighted beyond words.

"You bet your boots I'll come down," he cried.

"Business is mighty poor, and this is a big boost to me. My name's Carson."

A little boy named Jimmie was particularly interested in the cadets, and they took an instant liking to him. He was a bright and manly little chap, and some of the cadets invited him to visit the camp, an invitation which he willingly accepted.

Just before they rode off the farmer spoke to Jim. "Ain't see nothing of the ghost, have you?" he asked.

Jim shook his head. "No. Have you one?"

The farmer nodded solemnly. "Haven't you heard about the ghost of Rustling Ridge?" he asked.

"No, we didn't know you had one," laughed Lieutenant Thompson.

"There is a sure-enough ghost that prowls this Ridge," assented the farmer, gravely. "Every once in awhile it walks and scares people half to death. More than one family's up and moved away just on account of him."

"So far we haven't been lucky enough to see him," returned Jim, distributing the packages. "If we do, we'll try and take him apart and look at him."

The farmer shook his head. "Very bad business, that ghost. Look out he don't turn up in your camp some night."

With some light words about the ghost the cadets

swung out of the yard and headed back toward the camp, carrying the packages carefully on the saddles.

"So there is a ghost on the Ridge, eh?" Thompson smiled to Jim.

"I'm not greatly surprised," Jim said. "Most of these country places have room for at least one good ghost. They wouldn't be quite happy if they didn't."

The colonel was pleased at their success and planned to buy lavishly from the farmer in the future. The provisions, with the exception of the canned goods which they had brought with them from school had been all used up, and the boys looked forward to fresh, wholesome food during their stay on the Ridge.

The cadets had been asleep perhaps two hours that night when a medley of shots rang out from post Number One, deep in the woods. As on the previous night the three boys hopped out of bed promptly.

"Good night, this is getting to be an epidemic," snorted Terry.

"But this must be something different," remarked Don. "I don't hear any wagon crashing through the bushes."

"There aren't any more shots, either," mentioned Jim.

Once outside the corporal of the guard brought in Douglas from the post. The colonel asked for a report.

"While standing at my post I saw a white shape pass me about ten yards away!" was Harry's startling statement. "I challenged it, but it just glided on past me. At my shots it flashed into the trees and was gone. I was unable to find any trace of it."

"A shape, Mr. Douglas?" frowned the colonel. "What sort of a shape?"

"Well, it looked like someone in a sheet," explained Douglas. "I couldn't see any head on the object, and it seemed to glide along the ground!"

"Hum, our ghost of the Ridge!" said Jim to Thompson.

"What was that, Mr. Mercer?" the colonel cried, alertly.

Jim explained the story which the farmer had told to them that afternoon. "We didn't say anything about it, because we put it down for a lot of nonsense," he wound up.

"I see," replied the colonel. "Captains and lieutenants go to post Number One and look around."

The others waited a long half hour until the officers came back. There was no news.

"We found no traces of anything," Senior Captain Jordan reported.

Puzzled over the events of the past two nights

the colonel ordered the boys back to bed. It was a long time before a good many of them fell asleep. In their own tent the three chums talked in low tones of the situation, but could not puzzle it out.

"If this business doesn't stop pretty soon," Terry concluded the talk, "we won't get enough sleep while on this camping trip!"

CHAPTER V

THE HYDES TURN OUT

EVERY day the infantry had drill and at least once a week they were ordered to go on a long march. At first this particular type of duty came hard, for although they were used to drilling and parading they had never done much in the line of long hiking. It was the plan of the officers to get in a long march each week and so drive all traces of softness out of the boys.

The infantry took its first long march at the end of the first week of camping on the Ridge. While the cavalry and the infantry circled out on the drill grounds on Saturday the artillerymen were assigned to active camp duty. The cavalry was ordered to drill on foot under arms that morning, and when the orders had been read the infantry marched off with heavy equipment, under Captain Henry Jordan.

The march was planned over a route that took them across the top of the Ridge and across the country to the east for several miles. The roads were dusty and the marching not easy. Under the circumstances it was not long before the dust made

them thirsty and the heat of the summer day burned down upon them. At a farmhouse a halt was called and when the order "Break ranks" was given the entire company fell out of formation with joyous whoops. An immediate rush was made to a well which was in the yard of the farmhouse, and the chain creaked ceaselessly for several minutes. Never had water seemed so good to the young soldiers as it did now.

"I used to think that soda was pretty good stuff," Douglas grinned at Don. "But I never tasted anything so good as this water in all my life."

"There is no taste to water," put in Vench, solemnly.

"I don't know what you'd call it, then," breathed Douglas. "But this well water is the best ever."

The farmer appeared around the corner of the house and stood watching them. A twinkle showed in his dull gray eyes.

"Too bad I didn't charge so much a drink to you fellows," he remarked. "I would have made my fortune, I see!"

"Even so," smiled Captain Jordan. "A drink of that water would be worth a fortune."

After a brief rest the company reassembled and marched on, swinging over the country thoroughfare at a steady pace. From time to time they passed farmers' wagons, which stopped as the owners

turned to stare after them. Little boys ran to the fences to watch them march by and altogether they created quite a stir. By late afternoon they were turning in a wide circle and heading back to camp, tired out but learning to march.

With the infantry company was a brown dog by the name of Bouncer. He was the school mascot, and he had always seemed to favor the foot soldiers more than the mounted men. As for the artillery division Bouncer seemed to cordially detest the noisy guns and seldom went near the field pieces. He was to be seen most of the time in company with the infantrymen, and he always accompanied them on their marches.

Several years ago Bouncer, then a miserable and half-starved pup, had turned up around Woodcrest School. Some of the cadets had taken a liking to him, had fed him regularly and had seen to it that he slept in the barn and was well taken care of. In no time at all the old Bouncer had disappeared. In his place there grew up a fine big husky dog with a sleek brown coat, intelligent eyes and loyalty that goes with all good dogs. From that day on he had never left the school or his beloved cadets. The colonel had been very pleased by the action of his boys in their kindness to the dog and as the years went on the dog became part of the school itself. No longer confined to the barn Bouncer lived in the

school building itself, often visiting the rooms of the cadets and feeding often and well in the kitchen. He was officially adopted as the Woodcrest mascot and had continued to live on although the cadets moved from class to class and graduated out into the world.

Possibly Bouncer wondered why the young men did not remain always at the school. If any such thought puzzled him he never allowed it to show in his daily life. As each class came he made friends with all the boys and was deeply beloved by them.

Today he ran along with the infantry just as he had on many similar occasions. On the march he encountered more than one curious farmer's dog who trailed along and tried to be friendly. But when out with the cadets Bouncer was vastly superior and paid no attention to others of his species.

At the end of the march the infantry passed a farmhouse belonging to a family by the name of Hyde. It was a rough, bleak farm, worth scarcely anything but the home for generations of the Hyde family. As they hove in sight of it the three men of the Hyde family were sitting on the front porch step. The father and two hulking sons watched them march up the road toward the camp, which was just beyond.

Bouncer saw the three Hydies sitting on the step and went in to investigate. Nothing was said to him

by any of the cadets for the dog was allowed to go pretty much wherever he chose. With entirely friendly grace Bouncer ran up to the father and sniffed at the toe of his boot. To his astonishment his reward was a kick on his tender smelling organ.

Bouncer considered this a mistake and tried again, this time transferring his friendly attention to one of the big sons. With his tail wagging to express friendliness he approached the son and sniffed at his trouser leg. With swiftness the son reached out his hand, seized a large stick and laid it across the ribs of the school mascot with such force that he yelped in pain. All this happened in plain sight of the marching infantry.

Captain Henry Jordan was somewhat of a hot-head but only in such cases when his righteous wrath was aroused. At such times he went off like a rocket. This was one of the times. He had seen every act of the drama and as Bouncer's yelp reached his ears he heard a murmur from the company back of him. Instantly, his dark eyes blazed and hot blood swept over him. Swiftly he turned to the marching company.

"Company, halt!" his sharp command rang out.

The infantry halted, and at further command dropped their guns to rest position.

Then Jordan signaled to Lieutenant Don. "Lieutenant Mercer, come with me," he commanded. Don

followed the cadet captain into the yard of the Hyde farm.

The three farmers watched them come without moving. Bouncer stood close by, apparently at a loss as to what to do. Jordan looked sternly into the stupid faces of the Hydes.

They were members of a low, dull class who never cared to lift themselves intelligently. A lifetime of hard labor and uninspired thinking had left them slow and unresponsive to anything that was above the ordinary. Fear of physical combat was not one of their shortcomings and they would have welcomed any sort of a fight. But Jordan did not intend to do anything so foolish as to fight them.

"Now, you," the captain said, pointing to the father. "What was your idea in hitting our dog?"

The father looked them over slowly. "Why don't you keep your durned dog out of here?" he demanded.

"All right," snapped Jordan. "Admitting that the dog had no right to come up to you, what was the sense of kicking him? Or hitting him?" He glared at the hulking son who had used the stick on Bouncer's ribs.

"Look out I don't take a stick to your hide, bub," grinned the son. Jordan went white, but managed to restrain his temper.

"I suppose it won't do any good to tell you fel-

lows what low-down cowards you are, to mistreat a dog," he growled. "But let me tell you this: if it was my right to do so I'd set a few of the biggest fellows in the company on you and beat you up in the proper manner. I can't do that, however. But if I ever catch you hitting or kicking our dog again, I'll see to it that it is done. Get that?"

For his answer the second son reached out suddenly and gripped Bouncer's collar. He turned heavy eyes toward his father and brother. "Guess we'd better keep this dog a spell, until these play soldiers cool down, eh?" he drawled.

His father nodded. "Sure, we'll keep him. That's one way to keep that feller's sassy tongue quiet."

"Let go of that dog!" commanded Jordan.

"Come on and get him!" challenged the son, tightening his hold on the dog's collar.

Jordan turned quickly to Don. "Go march the company into the yard, Mr. Mercer," he ordered, crisply. Don saluted and walked to the road.

"What are you going to do, sic the whole regiment onto us?" sneered the son, rising and clenching his fists.

"I'll tell you what I am going to do," returned the senior captain. "I'm going to have my company shoot out every window in your house unless you turn that dog over to me at once!"

It was pure bluff but the Hydes hesitated. While

they waited Don marched the infantry into the yard, lining them up facing the house. The father jumped to his feet.

"Git in the house," he told his sons. "Take the dog along o' you."

Before Jordan could interfere they had stepped in the front door, pushing the bewildered Bouncer before them. Hyde showed his face briefly before closing the door.

"You bust my winders and I'll show you a thing or two," he shouted.

"After I shoot out the windows I'm going to storm the house," warned the captain, turning away. The door was closed a bit uncertainly and Jordan addressed the eager soldiers.

"Load to fire, first volley over the house," was his first order. There was a rattle and the cadets were ready.

"Attention! 'Aim!" The rifles went up in the air. "Fire!"

There was a flashing line of fire, a thunderous volley crashed out, the bullets going over the house. Instantly the cadets reloaded, ejecting the fired shells.

"Bring down the weathervane this time," ordered Jordan. There was another volley and the weathervane fell to the ground, knocked off by a score of bullets.

That was enough. The front door opened with laughable haste and the Hydes came tumbling out. The father had Bouncer by the collar and he waved his hand at them.

"Here!" he shouted. "Take yore old dog! Then get out of my yard!"

Jordan advanced and took Bouncer from the hands of the angry farmer, while the sons looked sullenly on. "It is a good thing for you that you came out when you did," bluffed Jordan. "The next volley would have knocked out every window in your house. Then we would have stormed in and turned the house upside down."

"I'll have the law on you, see if I don't," shouted the father. "I'll git the sheriff to fix you fellers."

"You go right ahead and get whoever you like," rejoined Jordan, patting Bouncer on the head. "I only hope that someday I happen to be around if you ever kick another dog."

"You kid soldiers are all-fired high and mighty," the son who had hit the dog remarked. "But you won't stay on the Ridge long."

"Thinking of trying to run us off?" smiled Jordan.

"No, but the ghost of the Ridge will clear you out, see if it doesn't," the son declared. Jordan frowned.

"Sure you haven't anything to do with that ghost business yourself?" he questioned.

"No, I haven't," was the surly answer.

"Go on, git off'n my property," ordered the farmer.

Jordan turned deliberately and walked back to the waiting company, Bouncer running on ahead, once more happy and contented.

"Company attention!" sang out the captain.
"Shoulder arms! Forward march!"

Followed by the muttered threats and growls of the Hydes the cadet company marched out of the Hyde yard and resumed their march to camp.

CHAPTER VI

ROWEN ISSUES A CHALLENGE

CAPTAIN JIM made his way around the last of the tents that formed the A Company row and then paused. With a motion that combined speed with caution he stepped out of sight behind the slope of the tent, his eyes narrowed, senses alert.

He was on his way to the section of the camp allotted to the cavalry horses. It was mid-afternoon and active drill was over for the day. Most of the young soldiers were in swimming, a few played baseball out in the blazing sun, and a few with less energy lay around in the shade of the trees that covered the Ridge. Jim had dismounted from his horse rather hurriedly to make a report and he was on his way to see that the cadet orderlies had properly taken care of the fine mounts.

The horses were just before him at the present moment, a score or more of restless, high strung mounts. No orderly or cavalryman was with them at the moment and no one save one cadet could be seen. This cadet was acting queerly, and Jim's at-

tention was the more quickly attracted when he saw that the lone cadet was Dick Rowen.

Rowen's campaign hat was in his crooked arm and he was standing directly in front of Jim's horse, Squall. From time to time Rowen looked furtively around the camp to see if anyone was observing him, and at such times he failed to see the cavalry captain. The lone cadet dipped his hand into the hat and extended something to the horse. Squall appeared to reach out eagerly for the dainty each time, but because of the neck of another horse Jim was unable to see what it was that Rowen was feeding his horse.

"Now, what the dickens can that fellow be doing?" Jim puzzled. "He seems to be unusually kind to my horse, but it doesn't look good to me. Of course, it is possible that Rowen likes horses and is feeding them, but he knows that one is mine. Maybe he doesn't carry his grudges as far as the animals!"

One of the objects that Rowen was feeding to the horse dropped to the ground, rolling a short distance. As soon as Jim recognized it he became indignant.

"A green apple! A lot he knows about horses! If he wants to be kind to them he should pick something else beside——"

He stopped short in his thought. Rowen looked

right and left again and then moved off a few paces to the left, reaching down for a bucket of water. With this in his hand he walked back to the horse, raised it to his eager lips, and tilted the bucket.

Jim Mercer waited to see no more. The whole cowardly trick was plain to him now. Each cavalrman was required to keep his mount in perfect condition and no excuse would be accepted for failure to do so. He could picture Squall after his meal of green apples and his drink of cold water, rolling in agony for hours, and himself severely blamed for criminal neglect. The boy's eyes blazed in fury as he hurled himself in Rowen's direction.

He was on top of the sneak before he was aware of the fact. Rowen turned startled eyes in his direction, his face paling swiftly. The tongue of the horse had just touched the inviting liquid when Jim landed his fist with all his force on the cheek of the cadet.

Rowen went down promptly, the bucket of water spilling all over his uniform. A dull red spot showed where Jim's fist landed, and Rowen rolled over with a faint bleat. With bulging eyes he looked up to where Jim towered over him.

"Why, you contemptible, sneaking coward!" vibrated Jim, his voice trembling on the verge of a sob. "You intended to bloat my horse so that I would do 'growl duty' for neglect, did you? How

about the hours of agony that the horse would suffer? Did you think of that? Get on your feet, because I'm going thrash you until you won't be able to walk for the rest of the summer!"

"If you lay your hands on me, Mercer, I'll report you to the colonel," cried Rowen, cowed at the attitude of Jim. The captain was ablaze with honest wrath.

"Tell the colonel all you want to, but I'm going to put you in the saw-bones den for a month," promised Jim, reaching for the collar of the fallen cadet.

At that moment Terry, Jordan, Don and Vench came around the end of the tent row. They had been playing ball and were now on their way to take off uniforms for a swim. They saw the positions of the two before them and hurried over.

"Look here, gentlemen," commanded Jordan, briskly. "You can't fight in camp. What's the row, anyway?"

"Mercer knocked me down," complained Rowen, while Don pulled Jim away. Don was surprised to feel how violently Jim was trembling.

"Why did you knock Rowen down, Mr. Mercer?" Jordan asked.

Under ordinary circumstances the cadets called each other by their first names, but in times of duty or unusual stress the more formal Mr. was used. The few cadets assembled saw at once that the situa-

tion before them was an unusual one and the air of the whole thing became formal. Jim did not in the least mind Jordan's commanding tone. Although they were both captains of divisions, and Jim was therefore an equal as an officer, Jordan nevertheless claimed a slight privilege as the senior captain of the school. On the following year, their last one at Woodcrest, Jim would be senior captain of the cavalry, with the unusual record of having held that post for three years. His heroism at Hill 31, when he rescued Vench, had won him that rank. But in the final year Don would be promoted from the infantry lieutenant to Senior Cadet Captain of the Corps, thus ranking a step higher than Jim, for all the latter's three years of captaincy in the cavalry.

So Jim readily related the story of the short fight. He felt that the action was so cowardly and sneaking that Rowen did not deserve to have it hushed up. The faces of the cadets described their feelings as the story was told. Rowen turned white to red-faced as he saw the looks cast in his direction.

"I don't care so much about the punishment I would have received," wound up Jim, "but how any fellow in the world with a grain of common decency in him would stoop to give a horse hours of agony is more than I can see. You fellows can see the evidences of his guilt on the ground, the pail and the apple. When you fellows came along I was

about to give him the biggest licking he ever got in his life!"

"Get up, Mr. Rowen!" commanded the senior captain, sternly. "We are not on duty, or I'd put up with this trick just long enough to order you under arrest! I don't mind telling you frankly that you won't last long enough in the corps to ever graduate if this story gets out!"

"I don't care a hang about the corps!" snapped Rowen. "How about Mercer here? Don't forget that he struck me."

"I won't forget him for doing it, but I will always remember him gratefully for doing it. Perhaps it was too bad that we arrived just as we did. However, if you want satisfaction, Mr. Rowen, you can call him out in the usual way."

"Why, look here!" cried Jim. "I wouldn't fight a cur like Rowen in the regular way. That way is for gentlemen to settle their differences."

Rowen sprang forward. "Do you mean to say that I'm not a gentleman, not even good enough to— to fight with, Mercer?" he gasped.

"I surely do," nodded Jim, easily, but keeping a wary eye on the cadet.

"That isn't your reason at all, Mercer. You know very well that I was the best boxer in my class at Roxberry, before I came to Woodcrest, and that is

the reason you won't meet me. Don't try to say that it isn't, because I know better!"

Jim grinned. "I never heard anything about your boxing from anyone but yourself, Rowen, and I haven't been fortunate enough to see any of it. But if you think that is the reason I won't meet you we'll just see to it that I do meet you and give you just the thrashing I was going to when the others came along. Send your seconds to see my seconds and we'll take care of the case tonight or any other time you wish to."

"Send your seconds to me," struck up Vench. "I'll volunteer as Mr. Mercer's second."

"I'll act also," Terry put in.

"Send your seconds to Mr. Vench and Mr. Mackson," Jim told Rowen. With that the crestfallen cadet moved off and the others looked after him in silence.

"I thought I had met up with about all of the mean tricky people in all my life!" exclaimed Jordan. "But that beats me!"

"What about the horse, Jim?" Don asked.

"I'll have to duck over to the canteen and get out some of the horse medicine and then run him around until he gets over the effects of the green apples," replied the cavalry captain. "No water for you, Squall old boy, until you have lost the effects of your unexpected meal."

While Jim was looking after the horse the others walked over to the tents, talking the matter over. All of them were deeply stirred by the total unjustness of it all.

"Just because Jim slipped on the springboard and made a dive like Rowen's!" said Vench. "I can't undersand some fellows."

"Well, I'll tell you," replied Don, slowly. "For a long time Rowen has had a grouch on all of us, for no particular reason at all. He's the kind of a fellow who just seems to have trouble wherever he goes. In spite of his boxing prowess I guess Jim will put him in his place tonight, or whenever they have it out."

"Just my luck not to be able to see it!" sighed Jordan.

"Can't you be in on it?" inquired Terry.

"No, a senior captain can never be party to a fight. If he was caught at one he would be instantly dismissed, and the fellow who would imperil his graduation in that way would be a plain fool. So I'll have to send my regrets and hear about it afterward."

"Wonder what arrangements Rowen's seconds will make?" Vench pondered.

"I don't know," replied Jordan. "But some of you boys will have to get on the job in a hurry. Find out who the sentries are tonight and arrange

a signal whereby you can get past them both ways after taps. We always allow a fight party to slip through when on encampment. Hustle out and see about it."

They had just finished their swimming when two of Rowen's friends approached Vench and Terry and made arrangements. Don learned who the sentries were to be and just before supper they told Jim of the plans.

"The fight will take place in a clearing about an eighth of a mile from here." Vench told the captain. "Applegate, of the seniors, will referee and Mason will keep time. All of the sentries have been tipped off and they will let us through going and coming. But you must not muss up Rowen too much!"

"Why not?" asked Jim, with interest.

"Because he has to go on sentry duty later on," laughed Vench. "So be careful of him."

"I may have to be careful of myself, judging by the way Rowen praises himself," smiled Jim. "He appears to be a mighty fighter."

"No man that would bloat a horse is a mighty fighter, in any sense of the word," growled the little cadet.

A few minutes after taps that night certain cadets appeared silently on the dark streets of the camp. In a body Don, Jim, Terry and Vench stole from the camp, treading softly. As they came to the

sentry on the east side of the camp Don whistled softly. Then they crept forward, meeting the sentry as he paced up and down.

But the sentry did not see them. When he heard their footsteps he stopped and looked down at the ground, appearing to be deeply interested in the moonbeams on the leaves. When they had passed him the sentry once more paced backward and forward quietly.

In the morning the sentry had been asked: "Did you see anyone pass your post in the night?" he would have been able to answer: "No, sir, I did not see anyone!"

Guided by Vench and Terry the other two reached the glade in the woods, to find Applegate and Mason already on the spot. The clearing was large and well lighted by the glow from a full summer moon, and Jim felt that no more ideal spot could have been chosen.

"Is this a grudge fight, Mr. Mercer?" Applegate asked. The two seniors had not been informed as to the reason for the fight.

"Yes, sir," replied Jim. "If you don't mind, gentlemen, I had rather not explain what the fight is about, except to say that I am fighting Mr. Rowen for a most cowardly trick that he played."

"It is not necessary that we know, Mr. Mercer," returned Mason. "If we don't know anything about

it, then our sympathies will not be for one man or the other, and that is the way it should be."

At that moment Rowen and his two seconds made their appearance and at the word from the presiding seniors the boys stripped to the waist. A few words were exchanged and then Rowen and Jim faced each other in the center of the glade, watchful and alert.

CHAPTER VII

A FIGHT AND A STAMPEDE

THERE was a silence in the glade as Jim and Rowen faced each other. The seconds stood back in the shadows of the trees, the timekeeper stood in such a position that the rays of the moon shone brightly on his watch, which he held in his hand.

The umpire or referee stood to one side of the two fighters, his eyes keenly alert to follow the action of the two.

Rowen crouched in an attitude that showed at once that he was used to boxing. Jim, calm and cool, moved lightly toward him. The first blow which Jim shot at the unpopular one, Rowen blocked neatly and quick as a flash tapped his foe lightly in the ribs.

"How does that feel, Mercer?" he mocked.

"No talking, gentlemen!" snapped Applegate. "Talk with your hands, if you must."

Jim was convinced that Rowen could fight and he brought every muscle and nerve into play as he tried to bore in past the guard of the cadet. In the process he received a few trifling body blows but

he kept grimly on. But when the first round had ended he had not accomplished anything.

"He is a shifty boxer," Jim told Vench, as the little cadet and Terry rubbed him down. "I can't seem to get past him."

"Wait until he gets ugly and loses his temper," advised Terry, as he rubbed Jim's back with a towel.

"Doesn't look so good for me, after promising him a thrashing in the name of the horse, does it?" smiled Jim.

"You'll get there in time, old man," consoled Vench. Don said nothing. He was a third party that had no official rating at the fight party, and it was surprising that Rowen had not exercised his right to have an extra person sent from the scene. But no one had seemed to notice that Jim had one more in his following than Rowen had.

"Time!" called Mason.

"Make it as quick as you can, gentlemen," advised Applegate, taking his place. "We must get back before they change sentries, or we'll all be ragged."

The thought of changing sentries had not occurred to the fighters and they leaped into the second round with more life. Jim was beginning to feel that his cautious method of attack was not the proper one. There was no question of the fact that

Rowen was far superior as a boxer and left in its present state the fight would be one which would bring him unpleasant memories when he looked back on it. As he advanced on the cadet a humorous thought leaped into his mind.

"At the time of the affair I could have licked Rowen to a frazzle, I was so red hot with anger," he reflected. "But now I've cooled down so much that it looks like a mere boxing match. I must throw all my fancy stepping to the winds and wade in."

In order to carry this plan into execution Jim took a hard right on the side of the face and kept on coming. It was the very thing that he needed. The blow stung severely and before he could adjust himself the left fist of Cadet Rowen had landed on his nose, causing the blood to squirt down his face. Stung into a fighting mood Jim fairly rushed upon his adversary and rained a number of blows around his face and shoulders. But Rowen stepped aside, swung a hard right, and Jim went over backward to the ground in a heap.

"One, two—" began Applegate, but Jim fairly bounced to his feet. But just as he took a step toward the grinning Rowen, Mason called time.

Jim stepped briskly to his seconds, his eyes burning. "Swab me up," he said, through set teeth

"Make a good job of it, because I'm going to carry out a few promises this trip!"

His nose was bathed and the flow of blood stopped. He was ready before the time was called and at the signal he walked with assumed calmness out into the center of the glade, his hands at his side. For a moment Rowen thought he was about to say something or call the combat off, but when directly in front of him Jim raised his arms to position, looked steadily at the face of the surly one, and then waded into him with a steadiness of purpose that showed his determination.

Rowen's blows fell harmlessly upon his unheeding shoulders and ribs and Jim ducked a left-handed blow that was aimed toward his chin. By this time he was in effective range of Rowen and he began to fire steadily. His first blow was a left to the ribs, a right to the cheek followed and then a glancing left brushed Rowen's eye. Three lightning jabs caused Rowen to lower his guard and a straight right caused his head to snap back suddenly. The unpopular one had become so busy defending himself that he was now in no position to attack. Jim hung doggedly onto the advantage he had gained, and the end of the round came when Jim was driving Rowen all around the glade.

"You keep that up and you'll have the whole thing to yourself," approved Vench.

Rowen came out in that round with the same plan in his mind and the session began in a whirlwind of close fighting. Once or twice Applegate was compelled to pry them apart, but the moment they were loosed they tore in again. Rowen's breath was coming fast and the mocking expression had left his good-looking face. He was growing angry and it did not help his fighting any. When he missed two hard right punches, both aimed at Jim's jaw, he boiled with suppressed anger.

There was a grunt from him that told the story all too well. Jumping back a few inches he prepared to launch a blow that would reach its mark. But the backward motion of his arm threw him momentarily out of position. Jim instantly dropped a fast right to his ribs, and as Rowen hesitated from loss of breath the cavalryman whipped his left up in a swishing circle that ended on the point of the cadet's jaw. Rowen's knees bent slowly and he sank down, landing face foremost in the leaves.

Mr. Applegate counted to ten slowly and then turned to Jim. "I award the fight to you, Mr. Mercer," he said, and walked over to Mason. Jim's seconds rubbed him down and then hastened to Rowen's men, where they were working over their fighter. He was slowly coming around and the offers of assistance from Jim's seconds were declined. In two different divisions the fight party left the

glade and returned to camp. Again a whistle plunged the sentry into deep thought and they passed through easily, returning to their tents. The three friends went to theirs and Vench slipped on down the company street.

Once in the tent the other two congratulated Jim in whispers. "It was a bang-up scrap," enthused Terry.

"Yes, that wind-up was certainly worth watching," agreed Don, as he slipped out of his clothes.

"Nevertheless," admitted Jim, "that Rowen boy is a fine boxer. The only way I could possibly win was to get in so close that he couldn't use his guard. In a boxing match he would put it all over me."

"But this wasn't a boxing match," reminded Terry. "You had promised to thrash him for doctoring your horse, and you had to do it. Is the horse all right?"

"Yes," whispered Jim. "As long as he didn't get a big drink of water he—Oh, good night!"

"What's the matter?" the other two asked, aroused at the dismay in Jim's tone.

"I've lost my belt," Jim returned. "I had it on when I went to the fight ground, and I guess I must have dropped it there. Confound it, I must go back and find it."

"You've got to have it for inspection tomorrow,"

admitted Don. "Wait a shake, and I'll go back with you."

"No, you won't," vetoed Jim. "I can sneak out myself and make the trip in record time. No use in running the risk of having you ragged with me. Douglas is still patrolling post Number Five and I can slip through him."

"Yes, but the guard will have been changed by the time you get back," Terry reminded him. "Then what are you going to do?"

"I'll just have to take my chances and slip through while he is at the far end of the tramp," replied Jim, putting his shirt on again. "I should have seen to it that I didn't drop my belt, that's all. You fellows go to sleep, and I'll soon be back."

"All right," agreed Don. "Good luck, old man!"

"Thanks," murmured Jim, looking carefully from the flap of the tent. "See you later."

With that he was gone, slipping back of the tents and keeping well in the shadows. At the edge of the camp he waited until Douglas drew near on his patrol and then he whistled softly.

Douglas halted, suspicious. He had been told to observe that signal for the fight party only, and to hear it now looked as though something was being put over on him. But as the signal was repeated he decided that there was some good reason

for it and he looked at the ground. Jim slipped by him and plunged into the woods.

It didn't take him long to reach the spot where the fight had taken place and after a little hunting around he found his belt. It had dropped close to the foot of a clump of bushes and was out of the direct rays of the moon. Buckling it around his waist Jim began his return journey to the camp.

But now, as he approached the place, he became very cautious. A glance at his watch showed him that the sentries had been changed and that his signal would now be of no use. He must trust to luck to slip past the man at the post, and it would be no easy task.

He approached camp at the end where the horses were corralled. Perhaps by flitting along past the animals he could more easily gain the corner of the nearest company street and by reposing on his stomach in the shadow of a tent he could escape the eyes of the cadet until it was safe to move on. With this thought in mind Jim moved to the horses and then paused.

There was a tall white shape close to the animals, and they had sensed the presence of the thing. It looked to be a very tall man shrouded in white, and he was at the moment near the foremost horses. Forgetting his unusual position Jim hastened forward to see what was going on.

The shape before him heard his quick step, turned toward him, and then moved with an agility that astonished the cadet captain. Slapping the flanks of the horses right and left the man in white started them moving. Jim jumped forward.

"Here, you," he cried. "What are you doing to those horses?"

The figure in white took to the trees swiftly and Jim was unable to prevent him. For the horses, frightened by something, perhaps the white shape itself, moved with increasing speed out of the corral. Before Jim could call to them it had developed into a wild stampede, and the horses were headed like a cyclone for the nearest tents.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TROUBLE BUG BITES DEEP

AFTER that, things happened rapidly. Just as the horses began their rapid flight the sentry on the post rushed up to Jim. As evil luck would have it, it was none other than Rowen.

But before he could say anything the stampeding horses hit the first tents. They had spread out in fan shape on their wild run, and those on the wings were unable to push into the company streets. Blindly frightened they crashed into the tents, taking two of them down in a twinkling and tipping a third over. The thunder of hoofs, the ripping of tent cords and the shouts of bewildered cadets buried under the entangling canvas, turned the peaceful camp into a raging scene of chaos.

Cadets at the further end of the camp ran out, only to meet the galloping horses face to face. They were too bewildered to comprehend all at once just what was going on, but they scurried for their lives back under cover. Everywhere there was a vast uproar on all sides. A cloud of dust rose over the camp, partially obscuring the moon. To add to the

confusion the sentries on other posts fired their guns in the excitement.

Jim stood confused, wiping the dust from his eyes impatiently. Close beside him stood his enemy, coughing violently from the dust that the horses had raised. When he could speak he turned to Jim sternly.

"What are you doing here, Mr. Mercer?" he asked.

"I went back to the glade for my belt and when I came back this way I saw a white shape near the horses," related Jim. "Just as I challenged him he slapped them on the flank, starting the stampede."

Rowen looked around the nearby woods. There was nothing to be seen. Deliberately he faced Jim.

"Absurd, Mr. Mercer," he declared, his intention plain.

"Do you mean that I am lying?" Jim demanded, his cheeks flushing.

"I don't have to mean anything. You tell me a story like that but I don't see the faintest evidence of it. What do you expect of me?"

"Look here, Rowen," said Jim. "How far away were you when these horses started?"

"A few yards. I was just patrolling this way when I heard them go," answered the sentry.

"Then you heard me say 'What are you doing to those horses?' didn't you?"

"No, Mercer, I did not," returned Rowen, steadily.

"You did so!" retorted Jim, flatly.

"I heard nothing," repeated Rowen. "When I got here I found the horses in flight and I saw you standing back of them. Under the circumstances I must tell that to the proper officers and the colonel."

"Certainly you must. But I will also tell them about the white shape."

"I hope they will be a little more inclined to believe you than I am," sneered Rowen.

Jim took a step forward. "Rowen, if you intimate that I lie, I'll surely thrash you worse than I did out there in the glade!"

"Mr. Mercer, in addition to reporting you for stampeding the horses, I shall also report you for threatening the sentry while he was performing his duty," followed up the vengeful cadet.

Hot words leaped to Jim's lips, but he stopped them. More words would lead to trouble, and he was sure that he had enough of that on his hands right now to last him for some time. Beside that, the camp was a bedlam and the horses were scattered all over the meadow below. Outwardly cool he faced the sentry.

"I am going to help round up the horses," he told Rowen. "I'll see you later."

With this Jim turned and ran across the camp, heading down the slope to the field below. The colonel was now on the job, nearly fully clad and with some realization of what had occurred. A detail of cadets was busy at the fallen tents, lifting the canvas and helping the stunned soldiers out into the open. One boy had had his shoulder strained but that was all the damage to the persons of the cadets. Most of the horses had halted on the plain below and were quietly cropping the grass.

All of the cavalrymen turned instinctively toward the horses and were now engaged in the lively game of trying to secure them. The infantrymen and artillerymen stood around talking things over, understanding that there had been a stampede but not fully realizing why the horses had run away.

"Guess something just scared them and they bolted," Cadet Douglas said, speaking to a group.

"I'd like to know where Jim is?" murmured Terry.

"Too bad it had to happen while he was out of the camp," returned Don, in a low voice. "If the colonel ever learns that he was absent at the time he'll have a job explaining where he was. If he dosen't turn up and go hunting the horses he'll have to answer for that."

Drill Master Rhodes bore down on the assembled cadets. "A few fires to be lighted, gentlemen," he directed briskly. At this word the cadets scattered and fell to work gathering fuel for fires. A short time later a half dozen fires lighted up the sky and threw the camp into bright relief.

"There is Jim!" cried Don, pulling at Terry's sleeve. "He has been right on the job."

Jim was riding Squall bareback and driving other horses before him. Lieutenant Thompson brought in others, and the main band of the animals had been captured. But there were now at least five horses that had run far off and some of the cadets saddled and went after them.

This time they found real work cut out for them. The horses that had run the farthest away were the unruly ones. They objected strongly to being captured and led the cadets a merry chase. The cadets not actively employed enjoyed looking across the fields to where certain cavalymen chased the elusive ones, and each time one of the difficult ones was rounded up a cheer went up from the corps. After an hour of hard work all but one horse had been captured.

"Mr. Mercer," called the colonel. "Take Mr. Thompson and get that one stray horse."

Jim and Thompson mounted and dashed across the field toward Twinkletoes, the stubborn cavalry horse.

The animal, a beautiful chestnut stallion, tossed his head disdainfully and trotted off in a sweeping circle, seeming to enjoy the chase keenly. He was moving away from the camp and Jim saw that unless he could get on the far side of the horse he would lose him. Accordingly, he abandoned the direct chase, heading Squall out across the moonlit field until he had passed the cavorting horse. Then Jim swung sharply in toward the camp, the animal now in front of him. Thompson stopped and allowed Twinkletoes to retreat past him, and then the two cavalry officers began a chase that entertained and delighted the camp.

Twinkletoes tried in vain to dodge out of the circle which the two young soldiers had drawn around him, and it took all of their skill to keep him from attaining his objective. Twinkletoes raced and plunged, first toward one side and then toward the other, making short and mad little dashes, but as fast as he dashed the officers dashed after him. In this fashion, working ever in toward the slope, the two cadets drove the frisky animal in far enough to make escape possible only by dashing up the hill. This Twinkletoes refused to do, and Jim, staking all on a last desperate drive, forced Squall up beside the disgusted horse and secured him. As he led him into camp a cheer went up.

"Very good work, gentlemen," nodded the colonel.

The horses were now all in and the work of securing them firmly went on. No recall was sounded and the cadets wandered aimlessly around the camp. When Jim and the other cavalrymen returned to the central fire they found the colonel standing there, surrounded by the instructors and most of the cadets. Jim was walking toward the colonel to make his report when Rowen stepped from the group, triumph written on his face.

"Mr. Mercer!" he called, loudly. All of the assembled soldiers, including the colonel, turned to look at him.

"What is it, Mr. Rowen?" Jim asked, quietly.

"You will kindly consider yourself under arrest for starting the stampede!" continued Rowen, still in the loud voice.

His words produced a decided sensation. The colonel looked particularly astonished. Terry groaned and nudged Don.

"What do you know about that! Jim started the stampede!"

"Mr. Mercer, did you start the stampede?" the colonel asked.

"No, sir," replied Jim, promptly.

The colonel turned to Rowen. "What is your exact charge against Captain Mercer, Mr. Rowen?" he asked.

"I charge Captain Mercer with being absent from

camp without official leave, of stampeding the horses, and of threatening a sentry in the performance of his duty!" cried Rowen.

"Those are very serious charges, Captain Mercer," the colonel told Jim. "What have you to say to them?"

"I admit being out of camp without leave, but refuse to acknowledge stampeding the horses or having been in any way responsible for their breaking loose. I did threaten to thrash Mr. Rowen because he insisted that I was deliberately lying when I informed him that a figure clothed entirely in white slapped the horses and started them on their stampede," reported Jim. There was a stir of eager interest from the cadets.

"A figure in white?" said the colonel, sharply. "What was that, Captain Mercer?"

"I do not know, sir," replied Jim. "I had lost my belt in a glade in the woods earlier in the even- I challenged him sharply and at the sound of my way back I approached from the end toward the horse corral and saw this figure among the animals. I challenged him sharply and at the sound of my voice he slapped the horses on the flanks, starting them on their break."

"Captain Mercer says he called out to the figure in white," said the colonel, turning to Rowen. "Did you hear him call, Mr. Rowen?"

"I did not, sir," answered the sentry. "Colonel Morrel, Captain Mercer did not call out!"

"Limit your statement to the fact that you did not hear him, Mr. Rowen," advised the colonel. Rowen flushed and trembled with rage.

"Why were you in the glade in the woods earlier in the evening?" Colonel Morrell asked Jim.

"I can't tell you that, sir," Jim replied, respectfully. "Others beside myself were concerned, so I would not like to say anything further. I have on the belt I went to get at the time."

"And you really saw a white shape at the horses, Captain Mercer? This talk of ghosts has not influenced you any, has it?"

"Not a bit, sir," affirmed Jim, gravely. "I distinctly heard the sharp sounds of his slaps and as I started for him he glided into the woods close at hand."

"Did you see anything, Mr. Rowen?" the colonel asked.

"The only thing I saw was Mr. Mercer standing there, watching the horses tear across the camp, sir," answered Rowen.

The colonel thought for a moment. "Very well, gentlemen," he returned. "I will consider the case carefully. Captain Mercer, you will consider yourself at least temporarily in arrest, on the two charges preferred by Mr. Rowen, namely, for being absent

without official leave and for threatening the sentry, although I realize that you threatened Mr. Rowen not for ordering your arrest, but for doubting your word. All these things don't go well with an officer's commission, Captain Mercer, and I shall be compelled to look into the entire affair."

"Very good, sir," responded Jim, saluting.

The cadets were sent back to their cots and soon quiet settled over the entire camp. In their tent Jim, Terry and Don discussed the situation.

"Just your luck to run right into Rowen," commented Terry. "I'd like to bet my last nickle that he heard you call out, too."

"I think that he did, but we can't prove it," sighed Jim. "Well, I'm not going to worry about it."

"You won't need to," reassured Don. "The colonel will see to it that you have the proper justice. Your word is as good as Rowen's and he will find out the truth some way."

On the following morning, when the Orders of the Day were read, Jim was publicly suspended from active duty until further notice!

CHAPTER IX

THE OLD MAN OF THE RIDGE

JIM's punishment did not last long, however. A circumstance came up that made the colonel suspend judgment for some time.

One morning soon after the incidents related a man in a buggy drove up to the camp. He was a minister who preached in a regular circuit of county churches and he was known to the colonel. The headmaster received him with great pleasure and the two men talked of many things as they sat in the colonel's tent.

"By the way," said the Reverend Mr. Powers, after a time. "Did someone go past your camp very hurriedly a few nights ago?"

The colonel showed signs of unusual interest. "Why, yes, a few nights ago a wagon with two men in it tore right through the camp," he said. "We couldn't stop it."

"There was a man and a boy in it," corrected the pastor. "Well, then you don't know what sent them flying past you like that?"

"No," confessed the colonel. "If you had seen the way they flew by, you wouldn't wonder that I

didn't learn anything about them. But tell me what you know."

"First, I would like to ask you a question. Have you heard anything about a ghost of the Ridge, since you have been here?"

The colonel snorted. "I haven't heard much about anything else," he retorted.

"The ghost scared these two off of the place. The father is a farmer who came down here from Pennsylvania to get a new start in life. As it turns out, he is very superstitious, and the very first night on his own farm, while driving into the yard with his only son, he saw the white shape skulking along near his barn. He was just about crazed with fear and fled to the valley, passing your camp as he did."

"Of course this ghost is simply some would-be funny person who is having some fun," was the colonel's opinion. But Mr. Powers had another opinion.

"I doubt that very much, Morrell. The thing has been going on for years and some very good citizens have given up their homes just on account of this thing. The joke would have worn out years ago. No, I'm inclined to think that there is something deeper in it than mere fun."

"Some determined effort should be made to run the ghost off of the Ridge," grumbled the headmaster.

"Who is to start it?" shrugged the parson. "No one seems to want to and the sheriff of the county simply laughs at the whole business."

As a result of this talk the colonel called Rowen and Jim into his tent after drill that very afternoon. They faced him expectantly.

"Gentlemen," said the colonel. Then he paused, and a frown swept over his face. "I call you gentlemen, and will continue to do so until one of you is proved guilty of deliberate lying. Your conflicting stories show that one of your statements, coming from one or the other of you, is a deliberate falsehood. But to get back to the business in hand: I have just heard some more tales concerning this ghost of the Ridge, and in view of it I have decided to drop the suspension against Captain Mercer. The word of one of you is as good to me as the word of the other, and until I prove that one of you is trying to conceal anything I must consider the case dismissed until further notice. Mr. Rowen, you say you did not hear Mr. Mercer call out nor did you see the white shape. But on the other hand, Captain Mercer did tell you immediately that he had seen a white shape, and that the ghost—or whatever it was—had started the stampede. Inasmuch as you did not see Captain Mercer start the stampede, and you doubted his word, I shall be able to hold him only on the count of being absent without official leave.

For that Captain Mercer will receive demerits. Is that all clear, and satisfactory?"

"Very much so, to me, sir," approved Jim. Rowen muttered.

"What was that, Mr. Rowen?" the colonel asked, sharply.

Rowen lost his temper in his sudden fright. "I simply said that of course a Mercer would get the breaks, sir!" he sneered. Then, realizing the slip he had made, his face turned white.

"So!" murmured the colonel, a great light breaking on him. His eyes flashed but his voice was calm. "I asked you if my decision was satisfactory, Mr. Rowen."

"Yes, sir," murmured the disappointed cadet.

"Very well. You are both dismissed," nodded the colonel. Left alone, his brain worked busily. He saw a good many things in a clear light now.

"Petty jealousy, and he is trying to revenge himself on Mercer," thought the little colonel. "I guess I can pretty well tell which one of those young men is lying!"

On the following morning, when the Orders of the Day were read, Jim and his friends were delighted to hear in the crisp voice of the battalion orderly that the charges brought against Captain Mercer by Sentry Rowen were to be temporarily dismissed, with the exception of the charge of leav-

ing camp unofficially, for which Captain Mercer was to receive twenty-five demerits.

A hundred demerits were sufficient to send a man home from the encampment and two hundred at school would dismiss and ruin any cadet.

That afternoon there was a partial holiday and the cadets set out to enjoy the afternoon. It was a mild and warm afternoon, with a fleecy sky overhead, through which the sun peeped at intervals. Don and Jim sat in the tent, trying to decide just what to do.

"What do you say to a hike over the Ridge, a sort of exploring trip?" was Don's suggestion.

"Sounds good," approved Jim. "Who can we get to go along with us?"

"We'll scout around and find out," announced Don, getting up from his cot.

After looking up their most intimate friends they found that only Terry and Raoul Vench cared to go tramping. These two had been sitting on a log watching the swimmers at the time, and they were glad to find something to occupy themselves with. In spite of their active daily life the cadets found little charm in idleness.

"We'll be glad to go along," yawned the red-head. "Goodness me, but I'm weary o' doing nothing!"

"Too lazy to do anything but watch the other fel-

lows swim around and enjoy themselves, eh?" inquired Jim.

"Yes, but you see, I enjoy it that way," returned Terry, seriously. "I have a vivid imagination and in time, by concentrating on the swimmers, I too feel the cool of the water and the exhilaration of the exercise. Just requires a little imaginative concentration, Jimmie me lad."

"You're a wonderful fellow," glowed Jim. "Just you imagine me a couple of ice cream sodas, will you?"

"Pay me first!" grinned Terry. "Money back if I fail to come across."

The four cadets set out at a brisk pace up the slope of the Ridge. It was heavily wooded and every now and then they came across a clearing in which a farmhouse could be seen. They were not long in reaching the very top of the series of hills called Rustling Ridge and they paused to look down into the opposite valley from the one above which their camp was pitched.

"Nice picture," observed Terry. "Why do they call this place Rustling Ridge?"

"In the fall, when the wind blows hard, the leaves rustle, and from that fact comes the name," Don volunteered.

"How'd you learn that?" Vench wanted to know.

"I asked a country boy that was watching us play

baseball the other day," replied the infantry lieutenant.

"Look at that old house up there," called out Jim, pointing to a huge square structure that showed a battered roof with leaning chimneys over the tops of the trees. "Looks like that was a fitting habitation for the ghost of this place."

"Just about," agreed Vench. "But that little cabin down below looks better to me, because I bet we can get a good drink at the place. Let's go down."

The others agreed and they tramped down the side of the slope toward a plain little cabin, constructed of unpainted boards, with a roofed front porch on it. At some distance below them they could see the largest town in the county.

"What town is that?" asked Jim.

"The colonel said Rideway was the biggest in the county, so I guess that is it," replied Don.

Reaching the cabin they rounded the corner, to halt suddenly as they saw a figure there. It was a little old man in a wheelchair, a man with sparse gray hair, sallow cheeks, and a few good teeth remaining. His eyes were keen and penetrating and he was puffing in evident enjoyment on a huge pipe. By the way his lower limbs were drawn up the cadets guessed that he was a cripple.

He greeted them readily enough. "Hi, there, boys, step right up," he shrilled, in a voice that possessed

considerable of an edge to it. "Soldiers, eh? You look pretty young. Where you stationed?"

"We aren't soldiers of the United States Army," Don told him. "We are cadets from Woodcrest Military Institute, and we're camping over on the other side of the Ridge. We were passing by and thought we'd drop in for a drink of water."

"Thought you were too young looking for regular soldiers," nodded the old man, taking in every detail of their uniforms. "Want a drink of good water, eh?"

"Yes," Don replied. "But we wouldn't want to trouble you any."

"Oh, hush up!" was the good-natured reply. "I know that you're thinkin' I'm out o' commission and I can't help you. Just sit down on the porch here and see how old Peter Vancouver does it."

With that the old man gave the right wheel of his chair a whirl and to the astonishment of the boys shot himself around in a half circle and in through the open door. From there they saw him roll across the room and vanish through the door of another room.

"My gosh!" breathed Terry. "Can't he work that buggy of his!"

"Probably years of practise has made him proficient," said Don, softly.

With the same bewildering speed and dexterity

the cripple returned in his chair, holding a pitcher and a tin cup in his hand. Even while in motion he poured the water out.

"Don't you boys be a bit a-scared o' usin' that cup," he told them. "I ain't never used it myself, and I save it for visitors. Haven't ten people ever used that cup and I give it a good rub down every time it is used. So just go to it."

He seemed to enjoy watching the boys drink deeply, and when they had finished he wheeled back to the kitchen and returned at lighting speed. Noting the interested looks of the boys he chuckled.

"Guess the old man knows how to walk well's if he had feet, eh?"

"You walk better than a whole lot of people who have feet," gravely affirmed Vench.

"If you was spendin' your life in one of these all-fired things you'd know how to ride one, too," the cripple told them. "Don't you fellows go. I don't see a heap o' folks and I like to chin once in awhile."

"We'll be glad to stay and talk with you, Mr. Vancouver," smiled Jim, leaning back against a post. "We are just out for a stroll and we'd just as soon sit here and talk as wander around."

"Glad to hear you say it," approved the old man. "Let's hear something about that there camp o' yours."

The boys told the cripple several things about the

camp, all of which seemed to interest him profoundly. In the course of the talk the incident of the ghost and the stampede was mentioned. The old cripple bent eagerly forward.

"Did you get a visit off'n the ghost?" he cried.

"Yes, he stampeded our horses," Jim told him.

"What do you know about him, Mr. Vancouver?"

The cripple chuckled. "All a poor old cripple would know about such like he hears," the man replied. "I ain't never seen the thing, but I heard plenty. Raises old Ned in the hills here, and has been at it for years."

"If we get a chance we are going to nail him good," Don promised.

"Good idea," the cripple approved. "Blasted business has been driving people off'n the Ridge for years. Wouldn't be surprised if the fellow drove you cadets home."

"Drive us out of camp!" ejaculated Vench, stirring.

"He might!" the old man thought.

"He'll have to go some to do that," snorted Terry.

"He'll be lucky if we don't steal his best nightgown right off of him!"

"Getting late, fellows," warned Don. "We had better be getting back. Thanks a lot for your good drink of water, Mr. Vancouver, and we've enjoyed being with you."

"Enjoyed being able to talk to you boys," returned the cripple, heartily. "Come up again some time."

"We'll be glad to," promised the boys, as they started off. The cripple called a final word after them.

"You had better keep your eyes open for that cussed ghost! No tellin' when he'll pop up and scare the life out of you!"

The cadets laughed good-naturedly and walked at a rapid pace up the side of the Ridge. The sun was going down in the west and they would have to keep up a good stride in order to arrive in time for the evening meal.

"Interesting old fellow, that cripple," Jim observed.

"He surely is," Vench agreed. "We'll have to take time for a chat with him some other time."

"Too bad he can't move around—that is, walk around," Don said. "As a matter of fact, he does move around mighty fast, but I mean it is a shame he can't go walking around, same as you and me."

"Like everybody else around here, he believes that dog-goned ghost is the last word in efficiency," growled Terry. "I guess the real trouble is that nobody dares to put on a real hunt for the ghost. Fellows, we'll have to make it our business to run down that ghost!"

"If it pops up again soon, we will," Don promised.

CHAPTER X

MOVING FLAME

FOR a week or more there were no unusual events. Camping life went on calmly, the drill and fun occupying the days in regular succession. By this time all of the boys were enjoying themselves to the utmost. Sparkling health was everywhere in evidence, and their skin had turned from an uncomfortable red to a rich and wholesome brown. Muscles were limber and strong, bodies straight and vigorous, and the appetites outrageous.

"We certainly are keeping the cooks hustling," Terry chuckled one day in the mess tent. "I'm going for another helping of beans."

But when the genial red-head went to the kitchen tent he was firmly but politely refused. "Nothing doing, Mr. Mackson," said the mess sergeant, firmly. "You've already had three plates full and that is the allotment."

"No more beans for a starving man?" Terry inquired, in dismay.

"No more for you anyway. I don't know why you should be starving, I'm sure."

"All right," returned the red-headed one, calmly. "My mother will get even with you!"

"What do you mean, your mother will?" cried the cook, staring.

"When my body is shipped home, and she learns that her darling boy starved to death in the camp, she will spend the rest of her life calling down vengeance upon the head of the hard-headed and hard-hearted cook that turned him away with tears in his eyes!" was the answer. The mess tent shook with the laugh that went up. But the cook was prepared to answer him back.

"You're right about the cook turning him away with tears in his eyes," the cook said. "It brings tears to my eyes to see the hole in the bean pile when you get eating!"

Terry retired thoughtfully, paying no heed to the mocking gibes which greeted him on all sides. After a moment he looked at Vench, who was eating across the table from him. Vench had just pushed his plate to one side.

"How many plates of beans did you have, Raoul?" Terry whispered.

"Two was enough for me," returned the little one.

"My son, heaven's blessings upon you! Just take my plate and hit the trail for the cook!"

Mr. Vench took Terry's plate and gravely ap-

proached the cook. But as soon as that worthy saw the particular dent in the tin plate he shook his head wisely.

"Nothing doing, Mr. Vench," he said. "That is Mackson's plate. You don't work that game here!"

"Thank you, sir!" Vench murmured, while the cadets enjoyed the failure of the move to the utmost. With that Vench turned away. But at that moment the cook was called to the far end of the mess tent. With swiftness that was commendable Vench reached over the stove and heaped the plate. Then he sped back to the delighted Terry.

"Ram that in your musket and keep still!" he said, as he took his place.

Terry needed no second invitation. He dug into the pile of beans with alacrity. And in a moment the sharp voice of the cook reached him.

"Mr. Mackson, where did you get those beans?"

Terry looked blank. "I am not at all sure, sir," he answered, politely. "I had just turned my back, and when I looked around there they were, right under my nose!"

"Did you come and take them while I was not looking?" cried the cook.

"Haven't been out of my seat since you broke my heart with your refusal," was the answer. "And you didn't give any to Mr. Vench, so it is up to you to figure out how I got the beans!"

"Bring them here, Mr. Mackson!" ordered the mess sergeant.

Terry shoveled the last forkful into his mouth. "Beg pardon?" he asked blandly.

"I'll put you on report!" growled the sergeant.

"My dear fellow, you can't," smiled Terry. "I didn't take them myself and so you have no charge to prefer. And if you did I'd pound all the beans out of you once I got you away from the mess tent!"

"That amounts to threatening an officer while on duty, Mr. Mackson!" charged the sergeant.

"That's not a threat, that's a promise," grinned the red-head. The sergeant muttered savagely but subsided.

"Much obliged," Terry whispered to Vench. "Some day I'll help you out."

"But not in the matter of beans," smiled Vench. "They just don't happen to be my weakness!"

One of the steady visitors to the camp was the little Carson boy. He was the son of the farmer from whom the camp supplies were purchased, and all of the cadets had taken a great liking to him. He was a manly little fellow and obviously deeply interested in the activities of the young soldiers. He watched all of their manoeuvres with fascinated interest and the cadets welcomed him in their tents.

"That youngster has the makings of a good cadet in him," Don said. "Too bad he isn't one of us. How would you like to be a cadet, Jimmie?"

The boy flushed with pleasure and looked around the tent. "I'd like it more than anything else in the world," he told them. "I'll tell you a secret. Want to hear it?"

"Well, if it isn't too deep for us, we would," Jim assured him.

"I'm saving my money to go to Woodcrest," the little fellow confided. "Guess how much I have saved already?"

"I can't imagine, but I hope it is a lot," replied Don.

"It is!" was the eager retort. "I have a dollar and fifty-seven cents toward it!"

"That's great!" said Terry promptly. "You'll need a little more than that, but it is a good beginning, anyway. Just you keep on going."

"I'll surely be glad when I get a uniform like you have" the boy went on, wistfully. "I think they are great."

"That's nothing," Terry told him. "You ought to see us in our gray uniforms, the kind we wear up at the school. Honestly, I'm so handsome I have to hide in the school all day long!"

"Why?" asked the boy, innocently.

"Oh, on account of the girls. The front door bell

on the school is always ringing and the colonel has to run to the door all the time. When he gets there what do you suppose he finds there?"

The farmer boy looked suspiciously grave. A wink from Jim had caused him to think quickly.

"A man from the cigar store!" was the unexpected answer.

There was a pause. "What would he want?" Terry asked, gently.

"To paint your picture on a cigar box!" murmured the farmer boy, unsmiling.

The others present whooped gleefully and fell to pounding Terry. The red-head enjoyed the thrust as much as they did.

"Very good indeed, my boy," grinned Terry. "I was going to say that the town girls were at the school looking for me, but I guess I'll retire to my corner now!"

There were other boys who drifted to the camp but they did not attract the attention of the cadets as much as the Carson boy did. They came to look around and fool a bit and in time most of them were chased away. But the farmer boy was never in the way and so he remained as the permanent visitor at the camp.

One afternoon a group of the cadets went for another hike over the Ridge and on the way back they passed the Carson farm. Jimmie called to them to

come in and they did so. To their delight Mrs. Carson, a plain, kindly woman of middle age, insisted that they satisfy themselves on a huge apple pie that she had made. They protested feebly and then yielded with a rush.

"But don't give any to Terry, Mrs. Carson," begged Jim, as they sat on the back porch. Don, Jim, Terry, Douglas and Vench were there at the time.

"Why is that? Doesn't he feel well?" the farmer's wife inquired, anxiously.

"He has had stomach trouble for a long time," returned Jim, gravely. "The doctor said that of all things in the world, he mustn't eat apple pie!"

"I'll tell you what it is, Mrs. Carson," spoke up the persecuted one, before anything else could be said. "I have a falling stomach and I can't seem to locate the bottom at any time. But I'm sure that if I can only have a slice of that apple pie I'll surely plug up the floor of my stomach and have no more trouble!"

"Of all the left-handed compliments in the world!" gasped Douglas. "He must think your pie is some kind of cement with which to secure his stomach. Tell a lady that her pie will plug him up!"

Mrs. Carson laughed heartily. "I guess there is nothing the matter with any of you boys," she said. "Try my pie and see if it is like cement!"

"I could die of embarrassment!" murmured Terry,

as he bit into his piece of pie. "But this pie will surely revive me."

The farmer himself came up and talked to the boys for a time. The unexpected arrival of the soldiers on the Ridge and the subsequent contract to supply them with fresh food had done wonders for the poor farmer and his family. A good many dollars were coming his way from the camp down the slope.

"Here is the baby of the family," smiled Mrs. Carson, appearing a little later with a pretty little girl of six. The cadets promptly forgot all else in their efforts to amuse and entertain Dorothy Carson. It was late before they headed back to camp, after thanking the farmer's wife for the good time they had had.

"I've had pie before," murmured Terry. "But never such pie as that!"

"Is that so?" inquired Jim. "Well, it is a cinch that Don and I can't believe anything you say hereafter!"

"Why not?"

"Because one time at our house you said the same thing about my mother's pie," said Jim.

"But don't forget, this pie helped his stomach!" grinned Vench, slyly. "Probably your mother's pie didn't plug up the bottom of his stomach!"

"If I ever speak again, it will be to myself, and in a dark room," sighed Terry.

They had not been back in the tent long before the Officer of the Guard appeared at the tent with a list in his hand. "Lieutenant Mercer, you will report for guard duty at Post Number Three at twelve o'clock," he informed Don.

"Very good, sir," Don saluted.

"Too dog-gone bad an officer has to walk post, same as a private," growled Jim.

"Walking post won't hurt anyone," returned Don, quietly. "It promises to be a nice night, so I don't mind."

At midnight Lieutenant Don reported to the sentry at the far end of the camp, that stretch nearest Hydes' place. After an exchange of instructions he took the post, waiting for the call. It came soon after.

"Sentry, Post Two," someone said near to him. Don faced toward the sentry who was next to him. "Sentry, Post Three," he called. Number Four passed the report call on until eight sentries had reported. Then they began their pacing up and down on their patrols.

Don's stretch was a long one, extending from the edge of the camp at the company street to a point back of the horse corral. At no time did he meet the sentry who patrolled Post Four. Just at the time Don reached the place where Post Four

joined his post the other sentry was at the far end of his stretch, and when Don had returned to the company street Number Four was at the beginning of his post patrol. In this way there was no likelihood of sentries stopping to chat and no huge gaps left in the line of patrol duty.

The moon was a mere slice but the stars were bright pinheads in the sky. The air was warm and heavy with the wood smell. Don enjoyed his patrol thoroughly. At twelve-thirty he looked up the Ridge casually. Toward the top he saw a tiny jet of flame, right above the Hyde place.

"Looks like someone striking a match," he reflected, pacing slowly.

Then he stopped quickly. The jet of flame sprang up rapidly. Something was burning rapidly, flaring up into a huge ball of roaring fire. And as Don looked, completely at a loss, this mass of flame moved with ever increasing speed down the hill toward the Hyde house!

CHAPTER XI

SHARP WORK AS FIRE FIGHTERS

DON stood spellbound while the huge ball of fire rolled down on the Hyde place. There was a crash that he could hear plainly even at his distance and the burning ball hit the barn. In a twinkling of an eye the wooden structure caught fire.

Then Don came to life. Raising his rifle he fired three swift shots, waking the camp instantly.

The Officer of the Guard rushed up to him. "What is the trouble, Lieutenant?" the cadet panted. But a red glow in the sky told him the story at once.

"Report a large fire at that farmhouse," said Don. The Officer of the Guard dug for the colonel.

By this time the cadet camp was well lighted up by the glare from Hyde's barn. The colonel saw that hard work was needed and he directed the bugler to sound assembly. This was done, and the half-dressed cadets fell in formation.

"Secure all pails and double-quick it to the farmhouse!" was the order. Instantly, the ranks broke and the commissary department was fairly turned

upside down as the soldiers rummaged for pails. When these had been secured they raced down the company street and took the road to Hyde's house.

Fortunately for them—and for the Hydes—the distance was short. When the first cadets arrived in the front yard the barn was a roaring furnace. Hyde and his two sons were running around the yard in an aimless fashion and as Jim and Terry arrived the three of them dashed into the blazing barn. A moment later they came out, each of them hanging onto squealing, thrashing horses.

"The horses!" cried Jim, and at the word the cavalrymen and the artillerymen formed a body around him. In a mass they rushed the door of the barn. Fighting their way inside past the Hydes, who were coming out, the cadets paused to look about the stable, gasping as the heavy smoke crowded down their lungs.

The inside of the barn was curiously lighted. A pall of heavy smoke hung in the structure, and through this curtain the dull red flames shone and licked. Snapping and crackling sounds reached their ears as the wood burned, and a terrible shrieking, from the terrified horses, went right through them. Blind with fear the animals kicked and screamed.

No word was spoken as the cadets made a rush for the nearest horses. Jim had not donned a shirt, but some of the others had and these they now

whipped off, throwing them over the heads of the rearing animals. Jim scooped a blanket up from the rack as he passed and made a cast for the head of a big dray horse in a stall.

But now his troubles began. The horse, wild with fright, avoided the blanket. It kicked at Jim and even snapped, tearing frantically on its halter. The heat was cracking Jim's skin, the smoke choked him, and the crazy horse made his head ache trying to follow his rapid movements. Worse than that, the halter was tied in a ring on the wall, and the cavalryman was unable to pull it loose. As he was ready to sob with anger his fingers closed over the catch and with a jerk that tore his skin he loosed the rearing horse. Like a flash the animal backed from its stall and tried to find the door.

Now Jim succeeded in getting the blanket over his head and he felt his way to the door. The first breath of fresh air that he got went through him like the stab of a sword. Stumbling at every step he led the trembling horse to a tree far away from the barn and tied him securely. The smell of burning hair jabbed his nose and he knew that the animal had been burned in more than one place.

"I've got to go back," he gasped, gulping the air in huge draughts. "But I can't, I just can't!"

But he started back, his feet like lead and his head ready to burst. Before he reached the door of

the barn, however, a blackened figure with red hair stopped him.

"They're all out," Terry shouted. "And I'm all in!"

Together they sank down on the rude back steps of the farmhouse, entirely played out. While they sat there the bucket brigade was having a lively time of it.

Those cadets who had been fortunate enough to secure buckets had jumped into action without wasting a moment's time. The vanguard found the well and began to pump vigorously. As soon as the first pail was filled it was passed from hand to hand and the last cadet, running as close to the fire as the heat would allow him to, tossed it on the blaze. By the time he had finished a second cadet had run forward with another pail full. A second contingent of cadets, impatient at waiting around the well, found a small creek back of the barn and the buckets were dipped in here. Two steady streams were now being played in splashes on the blaze.

There was no hope of saving the barn but the work went grimly forward. A mountain of sparks was ascending, threatening the house and the smaller structures nearby, to say nothing of the fields and woods. It required a special corps to put out the scores of small fires that jumped up in the fields and on the other buildings. But in time the splashing

buckets of water kept the sparks down and although the barn burned to the ground the house and smaller buildings were saved. The only portion of the barn that did not perish was one side, which reared itself up, a charred and smoking mass.

It seemed to the cadets that they had been working for hours on their task. Numerous neighbors had run over from nearby farms, armed with buckets and blankets, and their assistance was a welcome help. A wheezing old hand-pump on a flat truck was finally run into the yard and the water from the creek thrown in a more or less uncertain stream on the smouldering embers of the ruins, but had the Hydes been compelled to wait for it and for the neighbors they would have been burned out of the house and home. Clouds of hissing steam rose from the blackened wood as the water was pumped and thrown on it.

Jim and Terry had braced up sufficiently to join the bucket brigade and they passed the pails with the others. Some of the cadets had stormed in the back door of Hyde's house and had located a few pails and pans. As for the father and his two sons they had not been of much use after the horses had been taken. Utterly bewildered by the swift events they had run from place to place, too shaken to do anything practical.

"Were all of the animals taken out?" the colonel asked the farmer. He nodded dully.

"Wasn't nothing but horses in that barn," he returned. "The chickens is in the run there."

The unfortunate chickens were scorched by the heat which had been so near to them but all of them were alive. They had run around the long inclosure squawking and screeching but the damage had not touched them. Some pigs nearby were safe enough, and the only thing which had suffered was the barn itself and the horses, most of whom were burned in patches. Jim, who had recovered from his experience, dispatched a man to the camp to bring soothing salve for the burns from which the animals were suffering. This was done and under Jim and Thompson's watchful eyes the scorches were tenderly glossed over to heal.

A large group had gathered around the farmer and his sons and the cadets. One of the neighbors asked how the fire had started. Hyde shrugged his shoulders.

"I dunno," he said. "All of a sudden I waked up to see the fire and we run out in a jiffy. I didn't see how it got afire."

The colonel turned to Don, who was close by. "How did you happen to see this fire, Lieutenant Mercer?" he asked.

Don narrated the story of the moving flame. The

neighbors shot inquiring looks at the Hydes. A dozen tongues formed the word "Maul."

"Maul is dead," said one of the sons. "How could he do it?"

"Don't forget the ghost of the Ridge," said a man, seriously. "That's Maul's ghost."

The oldest son had been prowling about the ruins and now set up a cry. "Look a-here, Pop," he called. There was an instant rush to the rear of the barn.

In the dim light of a few lanterns they made out the charred outline of wheels and under a smoking board some whips of straw. A murmur of comprehension went up.

"Loaded a wagon of hay and lighted her up," shouted a farmer. "Then they rolled it down the hill at the barn."

There was no doubt that such had been the case. And no one seemed to ask why, a fact that puzzled the colonel and the boys.

"Why should anyone do a thing like that? And who is this 'Maul?'" the colonel asked.

None of the Hydes replied but a neighbor was very willing to talk. "A few years back there was a hill feud between the Hydes and the Mauls," he said. "One or the other of 'em was tryin' to drive the other family out. But all of the Mauls disappeared or died several years ago. This here ghost must be one of the Mauls!"

"Evidently a very real Maul, if he can load a wagon with hay and roll it down the hill," replied the colonel, dryly. "Captain Jordan!"

"Sir?" the senior captain replied.

"Take a detail of men and search the hill. If you find anyone that looks suspicious bring him here to me."

"Very well, sir," replied Jordan, and picked a detail of five men. They departed up the slope at once.

"You won't find no ghost hanging around now," grinned a toothless old man.

The colonel paid no attention to the old man and they hung around for an hour longer. It was now three o'clock, but no one thought of quitting the scene. From snatches of conversation the cadets learned that a bitter feud had existed for generations between the Hydes and the Mauls, but that the Mauls were all dead. The last Maul had been drowned in a nearby river.

"At least he was swept down the river in a flood," a neighbor said. "Nobody ever saw him since."

"Well, these foolish feuds ought to stop," growled the colonel. "A lot of innocent people suffer because of them."

"We'll attend to our own affairs," the father said, sullenly. "We don't need no interfering."

"If it hadn't been for our interfering tonight you would have been without a dozen horses and your

house, my friend," returned the colonel, calmly. The Hydes muttered to themselves.

Jordan and the detail returned soon afterward to report that there was no sign of anyone on the hill. "But we found the tracks and a lot of hay up on top of the hill."

There was now nothing to keep them there any longer and they went back to camp, tired but satisfied. There was no word of thanks from the farmer or his sons.

"Nice, grateful bunch," grumbled Don, inspecting sore hands and a red burn on his arm.

Jim ached all over but he managed to grin. "Sure, but we should worry. We got the horses out, and that is what counted."

CHAPTER XII

EMERGENCY SERVICE

THE drill was going on merrily. It was four days after the fire at the Hyde place and the cadets had recovered from the effects of their strenuous experience. On the day following the fire the colonel had ordered the suspension of the daily routine and a number of burns had been treated. The day had been a free one, and more than one cadet had taken advantage of it to get in a good sleep. Weary muscles and sore lungs had been rested to good advantage and now the swing of things was once more in evidence.

All of the units were having infantry drill. Even the cavalry and infantry divisions were compelled to drill with rifles every so often, and today, under Major Rhodes, a graduate of the school and one of the regular staff, they were hard at it. The sun beat down upon them from a clear sky but this time the cadets were well used to it. The hottest day failed to shake them in their tasks.

The colonel was not with them at the moment. He was in his tent and only the instructors were

on the field. The drill went on in swinging time.

The colonel appeared hurriedly and called the major. There was a hurried conference and then the major went back to his position. Crisply he called: "Battalion, attention! Count off in fours!"

The count ran along the line. At a further word the guns were dropped to rest and the cadets faced the colonel. He spoke to them in a ringing voice.

"Gentlemen of the Corps, we are faced with another call to duty. A good many serious things have happened while we have been here on the Ridge, but this is the most serious of them all. The little daughter of the farmer who supplies us with food has been lost or has been deliberately kidnapped!"

The closely packed ranks stirred. The colonel went on: "A number of organized groups are at present looking for this child all over the Ridge. We have not been asked to help, but of course it is our duty and we will form searching parties at once. There will be no more official duties until the child has been found or until some definite word has been received as to her whereabouts. I trust you will dutifully prosecute the search until every inch of the Ridge and the surrounding country has been scoured."

The colonel saluted the major and turned away.

There was a total silence in the corps but eyes flashed with excitement.

"Companies dismissed," ordered Major Rhodes.

The cadets broke ranks and stacked arms. From then on things moved fast. In groups the young soldiers formed for the search. It was decided that they would remain away from camp for the night if necessary, and knapsacks were hastily packed. While Don, Jim and Terry were preparing, Vench and Douglas hurried to their tent.

"Suppose we fellows form a bunch of our own," Douglas suggested.

"Sure," responded Don. "I think our best move would be to go to the Carson house and find out where the little girl was last seen. Then we can map out our campaign from that point."

This was agreed to and the cadets hurried off down the road. It was just noontime and the day was a good one. They wanted to get in every bit of work they could while the daylight remained.

"That was the cute little girl we were playing with the day we had the pie," observed Vench, as they hurried along. "I certainly hope nothing has happened to her."

"I'm with you on that," agreed Don. "But it is possible that she just wandered off somewhere. Wonder who told the colonel about it?"

"Little Jimmie Carson," said Jim, promptly. "I saw him come into camp just as we were leaving for drill."

It did not take them long to reach the Carson house, which they found to be thronged with visitors. Men from the neighboring houses had come to do their bit by searching and the strong Ridge women had come to console the heart-broken mother. Mrs. Carson was delighted to see the boys.

"Oh, you have come to help look for Dorothy?" she cried, seizing Don's hands.

"Our colonel has ordered the whole cadet corps to keep searching until we find the little one," Don smiled. "We have divided up in bands to scour the country."

"How very kind of your colonel—and of you!" cried the frightened woman. "With so many looking for the child I don't see why she shouldn't be found."

"Unless she's past finding!" croaked an old lady with a sad air and mournful eyes.

"She isn't past finding," snapped Jim, impatiently. "I haven't any doubt that we'll locate her. Now, Mrs. Carson, where was the little one last seen?"

"She went out last night about nine o'clock to bring in a rag doll that she had left out under the grape arbor," replied the farmer's wife. "I held the door open for her, so that she would surely find her way in, but she didn't, poor little soul. Oh, I'm so sorry that I ever let her go out. We searched the

yard immediately, but we couldn't find a trace of her, and she didn't answer our calls."

"Thank you," said Don, gently. "Then she disappeared from her own back yard?"

"Yes," nodded Mrs. Carson, wiping her eyes.

At that moment the county sheriff, a tall and disagreeable man named Blount, swaggered into the room. It was evident that he regarded himself as the most important person there and as his eyes fell on the cadets his brow darkened.

"Humph!" he grunted. "So those soldier kids are looking too, eh? Well, they won't find anything."

Terry looked at the sheriff's shoes, and then allowed his eyes to travel slowly up the entire length of his body until he had seen all of him. The sheriff reddened and then blustered.

"Well, what's the matter with you?" he cried.

"Nothing," returned Terry, mildly. "I've never really seen an important man before and I wanted to get a good look now that I am close to one!"

"Say, I'll run you kids—" began the angry sheriff, as a slight snicker went up. But Don cut him short.

"Come on, you fellows," he called. "We have work to do. No use standing around wasting breath on useless subjects."

"Look here, do you mean to call me a useless—" the sheriff began. But without addressing another word to him or paying the slightest attention to him

the cadets went into the back yard of the Carson place.

"Nice, kindly, old soul, that sheriff," growled Vench.

"He isn't worth thinking about," said Don, briefly. "Now, boys, let's get on the job."

Their first job was to look under the grape arbor, but scores of feet had churned up the ground so that nothing could be learned from it. They left the yard and struck off into the woods.

"Too bad we couldn't find a clue under the arbor," grumbled Terry.

"I doubt if there were any clues," advanced Jim. "Some of the men would have seen them in the first place. After all, we aren't detectives, and our job is to beat up the Ridge much in the manner of going over it with a fine tooth comb."

"That is true," nodded Vench. "Suppose we don't run across her tonight? Are you going back to camp?"

"No," decided Don. "We'd only lose time. We'll stay here and get a fresh start early in the morning. The colonel wants us to stay right on the job until some trace of her is found."

"How are we to know if she is found?" Douglas asked.

"A cannon will be fired three times," replied Terry. "That's the signal for recall."

Throughout the entire afternoon and early evening the cadets tramped over the Ridge, going to parts of the rolling hills that they had never seen before. There was no sign of the little one, although they kept their eyes wide open, and it was quite late before they struck camp for a single night. They made a fire, spread out their blankets and provisions, and prepared to spend the night in that spot.

While they ate darkness descended over the Ridge.

The meal was a good one and the tired cadets ate heartily. Afterward they discussed the wisdom of keeping watch.

"Not that anyone will come along and gobble us up," said Terry. "But if that child should call out in the night we'd miss her if we were all asleep."

"That's true," Jim thought. "And anyway, I think we ought to have a fire going all night. We'll want one in the morning. That ghost is some human being bent on mischief and we must keep our eyes open for him."

This was agreed to and the boys figured out watches for themselves. During the evening, before they went to sleep, they sat around on their blankets and talked in low voices, listening for any call or unusual sound. But none came and at nine o'clock they decided to turn in.

Throughout the night the separate watches were faithfully kept and the cadet who sat watch listened

to the night sounds. But when the morning finally came and they rolled out at daybreak not one of them had heard a single sound that would lead them to hope.

"We'll have to put in a good hard day," Don said, as they ate the last of their sandwiches.

Terry scrambled to his feet. "I'm going down to the brook and fill my canteen," he announced. "I don't know where there is a spring around and that brook looks perfectly all right."

"Maybe you had better boil the water and make sure before you drink it," Vench suggested.

Terry went back into the bushes some fifty feet until he found a gurgling little brook. The water looked cool and refreshing as it bubbled around the stones, and the red-head bent down to fill his canteen. It was then that a sound reached him, a sound that caused him to straighten up.

"Now, did the brook make that sound?" he wondered.

But it came again and Terry hesitated no longer. With a single bound he hopped across the water and parted the bushes on the other side. There, in a tiny hollow like a cave, her feet wet and her clothing covered with mud, sat the little Carson girl, her eyes red with weeping and her face swollen from her contact with vines and branches. She stared in wild terror at Terry as he broke his way through the

bushes, but as he spoke to her the look faded for one of glad recognition.

A trembling gladness filled the manly soul of the red-head. With a smothered cry he jumped at the child, sweeping her in his arms and pressing her to him as though she had been his own.

"You blessed little mischief-maker!" he choked. "What are you doing out here?"

"The ghost, he chase me," wailed the child, beginning to tremble. "I go for my dolly and the ghost come after me. I want my mama."

"You're going to have your mama," promised Terry. "So that confounded ghost is at the bottom of it, is he?"

"Yes, he chase me," sighed the child. "You're the soldier that ate mama's pie."

"That's right," grinned Terry. "Come along, I'm going to take you home."

He gathered the little body in his arms, easily jumped the creek, and fairly flew back to the camp. The others were rolling up their bundles as he dashed up.

"Took you a long time to get that water," Jim hailed.

"I'll show you what kind of water I got," whooped the happy red-head. "Allow me to introduce Miss Dorothy Carson!"

A medley of cries greeted the good news and the child and Terry were nearly knocked over in the rush. Dorothy Carson was pawed by the boys but did not seem to mind it.

"Where'd you find her?" Don asked, squeezing Terry's arm.

"Heard her crying back of some bushes," was the reply. "That darned old ghost chased her away from the house."

The return journey was swiftly made to Carson's house and the mother was nearly frantic with joy. At the farmhouse they found the colonel with Major Rhodes, and together they all listened to the story of the child regarding the ghost. She had gone out to get the doll, had seen the fearful shape near the chicken house, and too terrified to call out she had run away into the hills, where she had wandered until Terry had found her.

The boys were overwhelmed with thanks and praises and Terry's face became as red as his hair. The boastful sheriff was away at the time with a posse and there was no one to resent their success. After a happy time at the house they all went back to camp. Terry had the honor of firing the "Gossip" three times as the recall. Before two o'clock the entire corps was back in camp, eagerly exchanging news. All of them had searched faithfully.

Just before taps that night Jordan, Terry, Don, Jim, Douglas and Vench were requested to report to the colonel after drill on the following day. Wondering what could be in the wind the cadets went to bed, to sleep soundly after their strenuous search.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GHOST PATROL

ON THE following day, when the General Orders were read, the cadets who had been most active in the search for Dorothy were warmly commended. All of the cadets were thanked by the colonel. Then the officers called for three rousing cheers for Cadet Mackson. These were given with a will.

"Mackson again!" hissed Cadet Rowen, under his breath. "It was only an accident and yet he gets a cheer for it. Wouldn't that make you sick?"

No one being addressed, no answer was given. But Terry himself felt that it was simply an accident.

"I just happened to be there at the brook on that particular moment and heard her crying," he told his friends. "If I hadn't been the one, someone else would have run across her eventually. So I don't see what the fuss is all about."

"We make a fuss because you are such an old souse!" laughed Jim. "If you hadn't gone for a drink it might have been days before the child was found. Lucky thing you like to drink so much."

"I'll drink nothing but water all my life, in honor of the piece of service that drink did me," promised the red-head.

In the mess tent that noontime the colonel rapped on the head table for order. The rattling of tin spoons and plates became still and the cadets faced him expectantly.

"Gentlemen," said the colonel. "Since we have been here on the Ridge we have been quite deeply annoyed by this silly ghost that has been playing tricks in the neighborhood. I say silly in the sense that it is silly to play at such small things, but in another sense it may turn out to be something serious. I think that we have all had enough of the business and I promise you that if that ghost comes around the camp we will make short work of him. Now, what I want you to do is this: if you, any of you, learn anything definite about this ghost, either from hearsay or your own observations, I want all facts reported to me at once. Although we haven't time to go meddling all over the Ridge I think we are duty bound to lay this ghost if possible, and so I will thank you to let me know whatever you learn about this ghost business."

There was a buzz as the headmaster sat down and the ghost of the Ridge furnished the topic for discussion during the rest of the meal. Drill ended that, and after the afternoon work was over the

cadets named on the previous evening reported at the colonel's big tent. He was waiting for them.

"Sit down anywhere you can, gentlemen," he told them. "On the bed or the chairs. I guess we can find room for all of us. Will you pull the flap closed, Captain Jordan?"

Jordan obeyed and the colonel faced his interested boys. "Gentlemen, you heard what I had to say today at the mess tent regarding the responsibility of each cadet in regard to the ghost trouble on this Ridge. That will do very nicely for the corps at large, for if I gave some of them too much authority some grave mistakes of over-zealousness would probably follow. But to you young men I want to give a commission that I'm sure you will handle with care and tact."

He paused and nothing was said. Crossing his knees the colonel went on: "I spoke of the fact that ruining this ghost and his game was our duty as citizens, and it is. Inquiry has revealed that the people hereabouts are very superstitious, and they have taken this ghost on trust for several years. Of course, in a community of sensible men and women the thing would have been run out long ago, but there is just enough fear and superstition in the people around here to imagine this ghost to be the real thing and not some human being who is simply playing on their fears and ignorance. You may

have noticed that when we brought that child back to Mrs. Carson she simply said: 'I'll never let you out again where that ghost can scare you.' No question or thought about driving him away, but just a passive resignation to the fact that he is here and belongs here.

"But this ghost does not belong here, gentlemen, and we must see to it that he does not stay here. At school we teach you that every man has a duty to the public, and even here, in a strange country, we have our challenge. We must track down this ghost and expose him. We have the right to do so because he has invaded our camp and stampeded our horses. But I want the whole thing done quietly and steady heads must take up the task. I have therefore picked you young men to tackle this problem."

"I'm sure we'll enjoy it, sir!" smiled Jordan.

"What I want you to do is this," nodded the colonel. "I want you six cadets to form yourself into a secret Ghost Patrol. You are to keep it strictly to yourselves, and you are to make every effort to get some trace of this ghost. I give you full liberty to leave camp at any hour, and every hour, to pass sentries whenever it is really necessary, and to cut drill if the necessity should arise. I am not going to tell you how you should go about it, because I really don't know myself, but I will leave the work-

ing out of plans to you. Obviously, it will be out of the question to simply rove over the Ridge in a band, for that would soon advertise itself, but I'm sure you will make a plan that will bring results. If at any time there is a call that the ghost has been sighted around the camp you will dash out and make a thorough search for him. I guess that is all clear, isn't it, gentlemen?"

"I think so, sir," replied Jordan. "We'll do the best that we can for the community in this case. I have heard that in the last few years a number of good, honest families have left the Ridge simply because of this silly situation, and a thing like that has no business to be."

"You're right, it has no business to be," retorted the colonel, grimly. "Not when an individual rolls a blazing hay wagon down hill and burns up a man's barn, and then scares a child away from her home. To say nothing of stampeding our horses."

"What do you think of that theory regarding the Maul and Hyde feud, colonel?" Don asked, from his seat on the cot.

"I think there may be something in it," was the answer. "I can't find out what the feud was all about, and probably the present families don't know, so stupid are such things. Much like those you hear about in the Kentucky mountains, where families kill each other off for generations over causes that

never touched them personally. But I gather that the last of the Mauls was supposed to have been drowned and his body was never found. That points to only one thing."

"You think that he is alive and doing all this ghost business?" Jim asked.

"I wouldn't be surprised. As far as I can learn no one but the Hydes have ever been actively molested. Numbers of persons have been scared by the sight of the white shape, but only the Hydes have been harmed. If it had not been for the heroic work done by you cadets the other night Hyde would have been burned completely out of house and home."

"Now that every sentry has been told to promptly report any trace of the ghost we may have an even chance of nailing him," Douglas observed.

"Yes, though you may have to work fast. Well, that will be all, gentlemen. You will kindly keep that to yourselves and consider yourselves as a special Ghost Patrol."

When they had left the colonel the cadets separated and went to their tents. While preparing for the evening meal they talked things over.

"If you notice, the colonel spoke about the ghost starting the stampede," Jim said, as he washed vigorously. "That shows that he believes my story."

"I guess there is no doubt of that," responded

Don. "He simply can't doubt Rowen's word on the face of it."

Before the evening meal was ready it began to rain. The cadets had been fortunate in the weather during their stay in camp, and up to the present time only showers had marred the even tenor of camp life weather. But tonight the rain meant business, for it settled in for a long spell. Before long the company streets were a mass of mud. It was necessary to make a dash for the mess tent, and all the time they ate the steady pouring of the rain could be heard on the canvas overhead.

There were no camp fires that night and the cadets clustered in their own tents. The sentries looked forward to a bleak and joyless patrol, but the colonel knew that a sample of army life under all conditions was good for the young soldiers. As long as they were well shod and amply protected from the rain there was no danger of sickness and a taste of duty under stern circumstances was beneficial rather than harmful to the cadets.

Jordan, Vench and Douglas slopped their way over to the tent occupied by the three friends. This tent was the end one on the rear company street, backed up against the woods. The tent light made the place seem homelike, and it was warm inside.

"Fine night, if anyone likes it," grinned Vench, as he took off his wet hat. "We didn't have any-

thing else to do so we thought we'd drop over for a chat."

"Glad to have you," smiled Don. "It looks like a particularly dull evening. I'll bet we'll harp on the one subject, though."

"On the glories of the Ghost Patrol, eh?" laughed Jordan.

"I guess that is the answer," replied Don.

"This is something new," Douglas said. "Early in the year the Mercers, Terry and I were on the beach patrol, but this is the first time I ever heard of a Ghost Patrol."

"All I hope is that we get some results out of this new organization," Terry said.

They talked of the task ahead of them for some time. Suddenly Jim held up his hand, signaling for silence.

"Did you fellows hear anything?" he asked.

No one had. "What was it like?" Jordan asked.

"I thought I heard someone close to the back of the tent," said Jim, slipping on his raincoat and his hat. "Wait'll I take a look."

"Who would sneak around a tent on a night like this?" scoffed Vench, as Jim slipped out.

"Didn't see anything," he said, shaking the rain off of his hat and coat.

"We hope you don't hear anything else tonight,"

grumbled Terry. "Might as well bring a dog in here to shake himself!"

Long before taps the visitors had gone and the friends turned in. The rain kept up all night. In the morning it had stopped, but a gray sky hung over the camp. Just as assembly was breaking up the Officer on Inspection reported to the colonel.

"Something to show you on a tree at the end of the camp, sir," he reported.

The cadets swarmed around the colonel as he took a heavy piece of cardboard from a tree not far from the tent occupied by the Mercers and Terry. In large, crude letters this warning was written:

"You durned tin Soldiers keep youre
nose outn the ghost business."

CHAPTER XIV

A BRUSH WITH THE SHERIFF

THE carboard had been propped up in the space provided by a small branch. The letters had been wet and faint streaks showed where they had run.

"The sentries who were on duty last night please step forward," requested the colonel. A number of cadets promptly stepped forward, facing the colonel.

"Did any one of you at any time during the night see or hear anyone around the camp?" was the question put to them. But not one sentry had noted anything amiss.

"I can tell you of an experience that happened to us last night, colonel," spoke up Jim. "We were discussing the whole ghost situation on the Ridge, and our determination to find out who this ghost was, when we heard a noise outside our tent. I might more accurately say that I heard it, and I went outside to see if anyone was there. I didn't find anyone, but it looks as though some one did sneak up to our tent, hear what we had to say, and then printed this sign to scare us."

"But in order to do so the party must have gone

back to some shelter and spent some time making up the warning, if such it might be called," mused the headmaster. "I have no doubt, however, that your conversation was overheard. This ghost has developed a bad habit of visiting our camp whenever he feels like it."

"It wouldn't have been hard to slip past a sentry in the pouring rain, sir," suggested Jordan.

"No, not at all," agreed the colonel. "I presume that you young men will have an added cause now to go after this ghost person. I mean because he calls you tin soldiers!"

"That's a pretty heavy insult!" smiled Major Rhodes.

"Well, the ghost must know now that an active campaign is on foot to drive him off of the Ridge," said the colonel. "That ought to make the game more interesting than ever. Our foe is warned and will play his game with skill. That gives you boys greater odds to move against, but I feel sure that you will be successful in making an end to the affair."

The regular routine of that day seemed to take longer than usual, but as soon as it was over the members of the Ghost Patrol gathered together to look around in back of the camp for signs of the night visitor. The ground was wet and they argued that if the prowler ever left any traces he would

surely do so that night. Their first search took in the soft soil back of Jim's tent and they found encouraging signs at once.

"More than one footprint here," proclaimed Don, grimly, as they bent over the depressions in the dirt.

Someone had sneaked up close to the wall of the tent, and the prints of large shoes were very plain. In the heels of the left shoe they found a peculiarity that gave them something to work on. There had been some kind of a cut down the center of the leather heel and it showed plainly in the soft mud.

"Maybe when the heel was cut out of block leather the knife slipped and left that mark," Jordan thought. "With a plain marking like that we ought not to have much trouble. Let's look under that tree where the cardboard was found."

Under this tree they had more difficulty, because of the feet of the curious cadets had churned up the ground so that it was almost impossible to make out anything definite. But at a distance of perhaps three yards they found the marked heel print again. Whoever had placed the sign in the tree had come down the slope above the camp, and the print could be followed for a short distance up the hillside. But before long they struck a section of rocky ground and hunt as they would they could not find another trace of the print.

"A whole lot of this Ridge is pretty rocky,"

sighed Douglas. "From here on I guess we'll have to trust to luck. Somewhere we may run across the trail again and get our bearings.

They explored the slope with exhausting patience but there was no further trace until they struck the very top of the hill. There, in a soft spot, they once more found their marking. The print pointed down toward the town of Rideway, which they could see in the distance.

"He went down into town," said Terry. "Suppose we follow down there, and see where the print leads to?"

Following the marked heel down into Rideway was not an easy task. In some places they lost all traces of it and had to look around for half an hour before finding the faint mark again. But the trail led steadily down the opposite slope from the camp until it went into town. But here they lost it for good.

The main road was hard as a rock, with a glazed surface that left no trace of any mark. They followed this road down through town for a long way, but there was no further sign of the marked heel. Their next move was to look along the sides of the road to see if the man had walked off of it at any point, but after a good hour had been spent in this way the cadets gave it up as a bad job.

"Too bad," groaned Jim. "Right at the most

important part we lose it altogether. I guess that's the end of the whole thing."

"Yes, looks like we were at the end of our rope," agreed Jordan. "Anyway, we have given the town people something to wonder about."

This was true. The natives of Rideway had been watching the boys with curiosity. So busy had they been in their search that they had failed to pay any attention to the citizens, but the people had not failed to note what they were doing.

"Say," Don warned. "Here comes that nasty sheriff."

From a small, one story shack near them the tall sheriff made his way. His eyes were fixed on the boys and he walked with an important swing in their direction. They were not aware of it, but he had been watching them from his window for the last several minutes.

"Let's be careful what we say to this fellow," Terry warned, in a low voice. "We'll tell him we just come down to town for a visit."

The sheriff had now come within hailing distance. Hands on hips he surveyed the cadets with vast contempt.

"What're you soldier boys doing here?" he boomed in a voice sufficiently loud to attract the attention of the passers-by. A small ring instantly collected.

"We're just looking your town over," smiled Jordan, easily.

"Looking my town over, eh? I guess you are pretty thorough about it. Examining the streets to see what kind of dust we have here, I see."

"Yes," nodded Terry, innocently. "It is just like the dust they have every place else!"

"You keep your mouth closed, young fellow!" rumbled the sheriff, turning smouldering eyes on the cheerful red-head. "If I have any funny talk from you boys I'll lock you up quicker'n a wink. I want to know what you boys are doing snooping around the street here."

"We're here looking for a man who has been prowling about our camp lately," said Jordan, seeing that nothing was to be gained by evading the issue any longer.

"What man is prowling around your camp?" the sheriff demanded.

"That's just what we would like to know," responded the senior captain. "Not long ago a man stampeded our horses and last night he left a warning in our tree in our camp, telling us to keep our noses out of this ghost business. We found a heel print in the mud under that tree and we have followed it down into this town. That's all."

"Nobody has been anywhere near your camp,"

the sheriff declared, loudly. "You boys have been dreaming."

"Is that so?" spoke up Jim, sharply. "Listen here, Mr. Sheriff, I saw that man stampede our horses. Whoever is hanging around the camp had better keep away from it and stay away."

"What'll you do if he doesn't stay away?" scoffed the sheriff.

"We'll do what you should have done long ago," snapped Don. "We'll find him and send him to a responsible officer of the law to take care of. You are supposed to be a sheriff here, keeping law and order, and yet a silly ghost terrifies the community for years and you aren't able to run him down. We're neither too stupid nor too lazy to do it and if the ghost or any of his friends are here in this crowd I'm telling you plainly that we're going to nail him and nail him hard!"

There was an awed rustle in the crowd. The sheriff turned purple with wrath. He shook a long and bony finger at the cadets.

"You goldarned imitation soldiers, listen to me," he roared. "I'm warnin' you to keep your nose out of affairs on this Ridge! I'm the sheriff here and what I say goes. If I catch you meddlin' around with anything again I'll lock you up so fast you won't know what hit you. You mind yor own busi-

ness about people and things at Rustling Ridge, do you get me?"

As far as people on the Ridge go, we do get you," retorted Jordan, quietly. "But not where it concerns this ghost who has been coming into our camp at night. If he insists upon visiting us we'll surely get him in a way that he won't mistake. That's all there is to that."

"You'll mind your business about everything," declared the sheriff, flatly.

Jordan straightened up. "Right about face, forward march!" he commanded. The boys swung around on their heels and marched away. The sheriff bellowed after them.

"Come back here! I ain't done talking to you."

But the cadets kept on going. Back of them the angry sheriff addressed the crowd. "I should have run 'em in for talkin' so high and mighty."

"Well, that's an open declaration of war," chuckled Terry, as they made their way back to camp. "I'm afraid we'll have to fight that sheriff all the way along the line."

"Yes, because it is even possible that he has something to do with the ghost business himself," said Vench, seriously. "Anyway, he is mighty touchy about the whole thing."

"That is because he considers himself the King of the Ridge, and it hurts his pride to see anyone

else butt in," said Jim. "Wonder what the colonel will say when we tell him?"

The colonel heard them in silence. Then he spoke to them quietly. "You did perfectly right, gentlemen," he said. "However, in the future look out for this sheriff and don't waste any words on him. I don't think he really amounts to much, but he may make things pretty unpleasant. In spite of him, we'll get this ghost yet."

CHAPTER XV

A CHANCE FOR SWIFT DUTY

ONE morning a number of small boys appeared in the camp with placards announcing an entertainment to be given in the Rideway Town Hall. The placards promised great things in the way of entertainment and some of the cadets expressed the desire to attend the affair. This was finally brought to the colonel's ears and he considered it carefully. It was his theory that the absence of all town life and social life was necessary to a summer encampment, but as there did not happen to be any likelihood that social life would ever be a serious problem on the Ridge he decided that one night at an entertainment would not hurt them in any way. So, on the following day, the news granting permission to go to the entertainment in Rideway was announced.

Not all of the cadets wished to go, but several groups were immediately formed. As soon as the evening meal was over the boys shined up in their best and gathered for the trip over the hill to the town. In front of Jordan's tent the intimate friends of the Mercers gathered.

"Have you fellows got your flashlights?" Jordan asked. "It will be pretty dark when we come back, so don't forget them."

Those who had forgotten the lights went back to their tents and got them. Cadet Howes, the bugler, patted his instrument.

"I'm bringing the little lady along," he grinned.

"But don't use it in the hall," smiled Thompson.

In a body the group set out for the town, taking the trail over the hill. It was beginning to grow dusk when they arrived at the place, and only a worn sign, announcing that this was the town hall led them to the building. It was a long, flat building, with stairs running up to the hall, and stores on the lower floors. They clumped up the old wooden stairs with an energy that shook the building.

"Humph!" grunted Terry. "The hall is upstairs, eh? This building wouldn't take any prizes for beauty and strength, would it?"

The room into which they now looked was a long and narrow one, with a stage at one end and rows of movable seats in the center. A few people took up the front seats and more of the townspeople were arriving every moment. In the pit just before the stage an orchestra was tuning up, and several small boys were hanging over the rail and discussing the instruments.

The cadets walked down the center aisle and took

seats in the center of the hall. Another party of cadets, in which Rowen and his friends were included, followed them and took seats in front of them. There was some exchange of fooling between them, though not enough to make them objectionable to their neighbors. The hall was steadily filling up.

While the others were talking among themselves Don was looking around the room and thinking. He did not like the outlay. There were some six windows in the place, high above the floor and narrow. The only entrance was through the double doors that the boys had passed on their way in, and unless there was some door back of the stage, it was the only entrance and exit in the place. It was fairly certain that if there was a door back of the stage, it would be a small one and not good for anything in case of a sudden stampede to get out.

"And yet, I suppose they have been using this old hall for years, without the least bit of trouble," he reflected.

But the thought did not satisfy him. With a calculating eye he measured the chances of all the crowd getting out of the one door. It was obvious that those in the rear seats would rush in a fan-shaped mass for the opening, in which case those in the front of the hall would have to wait until the vanguard got out. Don knew crowds too well to suppose for a moment that they would wait.

In a panic a crowd was a serious proposition, as Don knew from a boyhood experience, when he had been present at a theater fire.

"A mighty mean little hall," he thought. "I bet there would be one awful fight for windows and that door if anything did happen. Of course, there isn't any use in borrowing trouble and there is no reason why it should hit tonight while we are here, but I don't like this hall a bit."

His answer was a curious one. In the distance there was a booming sound. It was the rolling of a thunder storm, which was approaching rapidly. There had been a pall of heat over the town, and now a faint wind puffed through the hall. Don liked the situation less every minute.

"What're you thinking of, solemn chops?" smiled Douglas, touching his arm.

"What do you fellows think about this place?" Don asked. The talk was instantly hushed.

"Why, it isn't any marvel of architecture," grinned Terry.

"I don't mean that. I mean what a perfect old trap it would be in case a crowd wanted to get out in a hurry. Take a look at the doors and windows."

The cadets surveyed the outlook and were not enthusiastic about it. "But it is like a thousand other country town halls," Vench said.

"Yes, it is. I was just thinking how I would

hate to want to get out of here on the double quick. I guess there would be more people hurt in the rush than there would be in any other way."

"You don't think that there is a fire or anything out of the way scheduled for tonight do you?" asked Jordan.

"No, but this place is pretty full, and listen to the thunder storm that is coming up!"

This was all too true. The dusk had been succeeded by a dense blackness that had spread over and blotted out the sky, and there was a moaning in the wind that was not reassuring. At frequent intervals the thunder crashed with a rolling crash, although as yet no rain had fallen and no lightning had been seen. Viewed in this light the cadets did not like the looks of things.

"Wouldn't take much to make this crowd stampede, and that's a fact," admitted Jim, careful to keep his voice lowered so that nearby townspeople could not overhear them.

"To make matters worse there is this thunder storm," said Jordan. "But I suppose there isn't anything we need concern ourselves about. We all know enough to hold our seats and keep level heads if anything happens."

"One thing we wouldn't like to happen," grinned Jim. "Let's hope the lights don't go out. People

will see Terry's head and think there is a blaze right in the midst of them!"

"Nobody would think you were anything," retorted Terry. "Because nobody would be able to find you! You'd be under the seat!"

"And that is all the credit I get after all these years of valiant service and high courage!" sighed Jim. "Well, I might have expected it."

"Look here, you fellows," Don proposed. "I don't want to seem like a calamity howler, but what do you think of the idea of taking seats nearer the door, so as to keep back a rush in case anything did go wrong? Nine chances out of ten nothing will happen, but I think we'd be better off in the back."

"Sure. Mercer wants to be near the door, so as to be the first one out!" said Rowen, who was sitting just in front of them. He stared insolently at Don, who looked coldly back.

"I don't remember speaking to you, Mr. Rowen," said Don.

"That's no loss to me, Mr. Mercer," was the bitter retort.

"Possibly not. Your statement that I would be the first to run can't be disproved except by actual test, and I sincerely hope that we won't be put to that. I'd try mighty hard not to knock anybody else over in the rush."

"You'd be so far ahead of anyone else that you

couldn't knock them over," smiled Rowen. Don dismissed the implication with a shrug.

"Do you fellows want to go to the back?" he asked. There was a little uncertainty while they thought it over.

"These are good seats," sighed Howes.

"Those in the back are just as good," said Jordan. "I think we might go back. After all, there may be some older people who would like to get nearer the stage, and it wouldn't be a bad idea to go back. Come on."

"Well spoken, my boy," Terry approved. As they got up some mocking jibes came from the cadets in the row in front of them.

"There go the heroes," said one of the cadets, a friend of Rowen's.

"Just another big grandstand play," sneered Rowen, loudly enough for the departing boys to hear him. But no attention was paid to his ill-natured thrust.

In the rear of the room they found seats and disregarding the stares of the people near them they sat down. The row which they had left was immediately filled up by some natives who had been waiting around the back of the hall.

It was not long before the orchestra struck up and the conversations around them grew more animated. A row of lights flashed up along the edge of the

stage and the audience stirred in anticipation. After the opening selection the orchestra players put down their instruments, the lights in the hall were dimmed, and the curtain went up. A hush fell over the crowd and the play was on.

It was a comedy that had been very successful in New York and the group that was at present giving it belonged to a local dramatic society. The acting was good and the cadets enjoyed it from the very start. But before the first act was over the rain descended in torrents on the shingle roof of the hall, creating a rushing noise that compelled the actors to raise their voices. The thunder was now directly overhead and the lightning cut the sky in jagged streaks, throwing lurid flares of light through the windows. A baby squalled loudly and an increasing uneasiness was felt in the stir of the closely packed people.

"Confound the luck," growled Terry. "Just when we were enjoying a good show it had to rain and roar like this. I can hardly hear what is being said."

"Shut up awhile, and maybe you'll be able to," snickered a cadet.

The baby who was venting its displeasure so violently did not offer to stop and the distressed mother was forced to get up and leave the room, the youngster roaring with vast enthusiasm as she passed down the length of the hall. The actors were a little

uncertain and there was a bad pause when one of them forgot the lines. In much poorer order than they had started the cast brought the first act to a conclusion and retired from the stage. The clapping was rather feeble and there was a breath of relief when the lights went on.

"Too bad, but the storm is spoiling the play," Jordan sighed.

"Maybe it will let up pretty soon," suggested Don, hopefully.

But it was unfortunately the type of storm that rolls around the hills, and before long it was back again, every bit as annoying as it had been in the first place. The second act had been under way for perhaps five minutes when there was a blinding flash of lightning, an ear-splitting clap of thunder, and the stage lights went out with a jerk. For a moment there was complete silence and no one moved. But a gasp went up.

Some one spoke from the platform. "Ladies and gentlemen, keep your seats and everything will be all right in just a few seconds," said a cheery voice, coming from the blackness in the front of the room. "We will provide lights in a very few moments, to resume the play or to light our way out. So please just sit right where you are."

"Good boy, whoever you are," approved Jim.

"The crowd is behaving in great style," began

Don, when someone struck a match on the far side of the room.

"Idiot!" hissed Jordan. "Of all the foolish things to do——"

"Fire!" shouted an excited reckless voice. A foot scraped, someone got up, and in a fraction of a second there was an uproar as the whole crowd jumped up and began to push and fight for the door.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BUGLER BLOWS "TO POST"

NOTHING is so fearful as a crowd in a panic. The cadets had not had much experience in life with such things, but they knew that tragedy was upon them at the moment.

They rose from their seats in dismay, undecided as to what to do. The turn of affairs had come with such a suddenness that they were left high and dry as to what to do. There was no opportunity to make any plans and for a single moment they were bewildered by the cries and the noise of the scuffling. Then one cadet rose to the occasion with presence of mind.

When it all happened Cadet Howes had jumped to his feet, frightened and unnerved. His fingers had reached and closed over his bugle. At first touch it meant nothing to him, he found a comfort in the touch of the familiar instrument and allowed it to occupy that place in the scheme of things. But another thought raced across his active mind, and he raised it to his lips. With all his force Cadet Howes played the school call "Cadets to Post."

It acted on the crowd only momentarily, startling some of them as the clear, ringing sound filled the wooden hall. But it brought the cadets to their sense at once. Douglas was the first to remember that he had a flashlight with him, and with a savage jerk he turned on the light, playing it over the crowd. The brains of the other boys cleared like magic and soon a score of flashlights flooded light over the pushing people.

Not that that was sufficient in itself to stop the rush, but it was the beginning of the end. Howes sounded "To Post" again, and the cadets on the back row went into action. People were still shoving madly for the stairs and women and children were being jammed mercilessly against the door posts. Jordan saw this and took command at once. He stepped over the rear row of seat backs and dived into the struggling crowd. Careful to keep their lights on the people the others followed him. The cadets in the middle of the hall now responded by turning on their flashes and there was plenty of light.

But the people did not intend to halt just because there was light. They had one desire and that was to get out of the building. To this end they pressed doggedly onward, disregarding the ones in front of them. Jordan switched off his light, put it in his pocket and went to work.

"Men stand back!" he bellowed. "Only women and children can go out."

His voice could barely be heard over the noise of the frightened crowd, but most of the men stopped their pushing. But as some of them persisted Jordan and Don waded into the milling mass. Every man within reach was seized by the shoulder and forced backward while the women and children were hurried forward. With thoughtfulness Terry and Jim made their way to the door frames and stood there, so that no one could be smashed up against the wooden sides. They helped to guide people down the stairs as best they could. The other cadets realized that their job was to supply light and they stuck to it.

Things looked pretty good, but there was a commotion in the back of the group close to the door. A broad shouldered man who looked to be a farm hand was bolting his way toward the door, thrusting others right and left. His eyes gleamed with fright and his purpose was to get out at once, no matter who was in his way. There was a group of young girls at the door, who were passing the cadets in an orderly fashion, when the big man projected himself upon them, scattering them to one side. Jordan swung around on him.

"Here, you, stop right where you are!" he commanded. "There's no rush. You'll get out just as

soon as the women do. There is no fire or anything."

But the man paid him not the slightest bit of attention. He continued to push, and one or two others, thinking to slip out with him, followed hard after him. Jordan felt that there was but one thing to do, to save the situation. He drew back his fist and let it fly at the heavy chin of the country man.

Under ordinary circumstances the blow would have meant little, for the man would have been prepared for it and hardened. But it caught him unawares and his head snapped back with a jerk. He tottered and fell backward, slumping to the floor. Those in the room looked with awe at the cadet captain, who seized his opportunity with the swiftness of thought.

"Anybody who crowds will get the same dose!" he cried, with mock savageness. "No one but women and children can get down this staircase at present."

His prompt lesson impressed itself on the people. The pushing stopped and they looked from the man on the floor to Jordan. The man was holding his jaw tenderly and glaring at the cadet.

"I'll get you in fine trouble for this, see if I don't," the man snarled, as he got up from the floor. It looked for a moment as though he contemplated an attack on the captain, but he only slunk past Jordan and down the stairs. At that moment the lights

flashed on, to the relief of the ones who had not left the hall. The cadets promptly turned the flash-lights off.

The director of the entertainment made his appearance on the platform and requested that everyone return to his or her seat and stay until the end of the play. He spoke warmly of the prompt service the cadets had rendered, and every eye was turned to the boys in the back of the room. Not everyone returned to see the play, but most of those who had pushed out of the building and who now stood in the street were persuaded to come back and see it through. A very small percentage of the original audience went to their respective homes, unnerved by their experience.

Just before the act began the cadets were surprised to see Rowen come up the stairs and try to sneak past them to return to his seat. It was apparent that he regretted it at once, for a suspicion of the truth leaped into the minds of the boys at once. When the panic had started Rowen had been in the center of the room, and now he was coming up the stairs from outside. But no cadet had seen him rush past on his way out.

"Hello," sang out Jordan. "How did you get outside?"

Rowen flushed hotly. "I went out when you weren't looking. Lost my head, I guess."

"That's funny. I didn't see you get past me. I'm sure that no one but women and children got out." Jordan looked over toward the window near the row in which Rowen sat. "Mr. Rowen, did you drop out of the window?"

There was an awkward pause. The conversation had been carried on in a low tone, as none of them wished to make the embarrassed cadet the talk of the hall. Rowen nodded jerkily.

"Yes, sir, I did."

Nothing more was said by any of them. It was the time that Don and his friends could have rubbed it in for Rowen's sneering remarks earlier in the evening, but they were not the kind who rubbed things in. Rowen felt the force of their glances and he writhed under them.

"I—I was kind of pushed toward the window, and I thought as long as I was so near I might have some chance to do something by running for police or fire company or something, so I just dropped out to see if I could do something," went on the cadet, glancing at them hopefully.

"Your original statement to me was that you had lost your head and had slipped past me," returned the senior captain, quietly. "I think you need to cool down quite a bit, Mr. Rowen. Your friends are expecting you, I think."

Without further word the guilty one moved away

from them and joined his companions in the row of seats in the center of the room. The cadets in the back exchanged looks that expressed more than words would have told.

"It didn't take long to puncture that bubble," Douglas remarked.

"All I hope is that no one saw him go out of the window that way," frowned Jordan. "That would give us a bad name, if anyone saw a cadet skinning through a window as fast as he could go."

"I'll bet he was one of the first ones out of the building," Terry grinned.

"If I remember correctly, he made some remark about our grandstand play in going to the back of the room," Jim said. "I'll wager he would have been out even sooner had he been back here."

"A lot of people would have been hurt if we hadn't been back here," Don chimed in. "Well, suppose we let Rowen alone unless there is some good excuse for telling this story? I don't see any use in making him any more bitter by broadcasting it."

The others agreed that this was best, although all of them longed to even up scores with the disagreeable little cadet. They now turned their attention to the second and last act of the play. The seats had filled up again and the cast was back on the stage, going through the motions and repeating the lines. But it did not take them long to see that

there was no heart in the play, and when it came to an end it was flat and somewhat disappointing. Far in the distance the thunder could be heard as it rolled.

"Well, the panic spoiled everything," Jim remarked, as the lights flashed up. "You could see that all the play was knocked out of the players."

"Yes," Vench agreed. "I guess we can't blame them for that, though."

"Come on," urged Jordan. "Let's get out before anyone stops us."

But there was no chance of that. A number of the townspeople swarmed around them, thanking them on their fine work. The men shook them heartily by the hand and the women praised them in no uncertain tones.

"You boys saved a lot of people from serious injury, if not from death," said the head of the town school, as he shook hands all around. "I'm going to see to it that your colonel knows all about it."

"Don't bother about that, sir," said Thompson. "It wasn't anything."

"I suppose not!" mocked the schoolmaster. "Just all in the day's work, eh?"

So many wanted to shake hands with the boys that they were lined up all around them, much to the embarrassment of the cadets. But before all of them could get near enough to express their sen-

timents there was a stir in the crowd, which gave way right and left to admit the sheriff and the man whom Jordan had knocked down. The officer of the law faced them with a fierce frown on his face.

"So, you confounded kids are still minding other people's business than your own, eh?" he roared out in his bullying way. "But I guess this will be the last time you'll do it. I've got a serious charge against you now."

CHAPTER XVII

A MESSAGE IN WIG-WAG

THE hot-headed Jordan flared immediately. But he realized that the loss of his temper would not do him any good, and he determined to keep his tongue from saying things for which he would be sorry afterward. Realizing that he had the crowd with him, he tried to answer so that there would be no reproach afterward.

"Yes, Mr. Sheriff, we were minding other people's business than our own," he said. "As it turns out, we were minding your business. The business that you should have been minding yourself."

"What are you talking about?" the sheriff demanded angrily.

"I guess you have heard about the panic that went on here," replied the cadet leader. "If we fellows hadn't been lucky enough to have had our flashlights with us, and lucky that we sat back here, a lot of people would have been injured when all the lights went out."

"It wasn't my fault that the lights went out," re-

turned the sheriff. "That crack of thunder and the lightning put all the power out at the station. How can you pin that on me?"

"I'm not trying to," said Jordan. "But you say we are putting our noses into other people's business. I say we were putting them into your business! Because, where were you while all this was going on? What do you think about your duty as sheriff? Here you have a town hall with a single door to go in and out of, a regular fire-trap if ever there was one, and how many men have you on guard to see to it that there was no riot or disturbance? If you had any, I don't know where they are, and certainly they weren't in evidence during the panic. You yourself were not here. Yes, we had our nose in somebody's business, and that business was yours, the business you should have been attending to!"

There was a murmur of approbation as Jordan wound up in his accusation of the sheriff, and the man grew positively purple in the face. He shook his finger under Jordan's nose.

"You fresh, stuckup soldier kid, I'll teach you to talk like this to me!" he bellowed. "What about this man here? You hit him for nothing."

"I hit him because he refused to obey my orders," snapped Jordan, drawing himself up sharply. His temper was in a bad way now, and he was smoulder-

ing. "I ordered every man in the place to stand back and allow the women and children to get out of the door. This man did not obey me, but he tried to rush the door instead. I knocked him down, and let me tell you that I would have done the same to any man who had tried to rush past me!"

"Say, maybe you'll be so kind as to tell us who you are!" sneered the sheriff, placing his hands on his hips and bending forward slightly. "He refused to obey your orders! Who are you that you can give orders?"

"At the moment I was in complete charge of this hall," said the senior captain. "In the name of the women and children who would have been hurt. If it had been you who had tried to get past me, sheriff, I would have punched your jaw as quickly as I did his!"

There was a gasp of astonishment and the lips of the sheriff trembled. He grabbed the senior captain by the arm. "I arrest you for that," he snarled. "You'll tell it all to the judge in the morning. We'll see if a night in the town jail will cool you off a bit, my bucko!"

Jordan turned the least bit pale but he kept his face firm. "Just as you say," he nodded.

Terry Mackson stepped forward, his eyes bright. "Look here, you fellows," he called to the cadets. "Are you going to allow this big noise of a sheriff to

take Jordan to the jail? I move we throw the sheriff down the stairs and then let him come to camp to get us!"

"No, you don't," cried Don, pulling Terry to one side. "We will all keep out of this. No use in making it any worse than it is. We'll report to the colonel and I guess he will be able to take care of the situation."

"The colonel will tell this sheriff a few things that will scorch him a bit," Vench said, looking the man fully in the eyes.

"I'll put your colonel just where I'm going to put this young man," promised the sheriff, taking a firmer hold on Jordan's arm.

"You fellows keep out of all this," Jordan told them. "Just see to it that the colonel knows what has happened, that's all."

"Come along to the jail," ordered the sheriff, pulling the captain's arm.

"Just a second, sheriff," said a quiet voice from the rear of the crowd.

A short and slightly stout man made his way through the press and faced the sheriff. At sight of him the sheriff looked uncomfortable and sullen.

"What do you want, Mr. Morley?" he grumbled.

"In the first place, sheriff, I want you to let go of that young man's arm," said Mr. Morley, quietly. There was a pause, during which the sheriff and the

citizen exchanged challenging looks, and then with bad grace the officer of the law dropped his hold from Jordan's sleeve.

"You have no right to interfere with an officer when he is performing his duty," remarked the sheriff.

"You are not performing a duty when you arrest that young man, but you are acting like a spoiled child," said Mr. Morley, warmly. "Every word that this cadet has said about you is true as true can be, sheriff. Why weren't you on duty here tonight? Why didn't you have men on duty? If you had been here you would have seen these soldiers save many an arm and leg and perhaps many a life by their cool and prompt conduct. My own wife and children are here and they might have been trampled in the panic. You won't so much as lay hands on this cadet again, tonight or any other night, because if you do it will be the end of you politically, sheriff. I guess you know that I have power enough to fix it so that you'd never hold a job in this county again. Isn't that so?"

"I suppose it is," rumbled the sheriff. "But I don't see why you have to be so hard on a man when he is trying to do his duty as he sees it. I was goin' over some papers in my office, or I'd have been up here myself."

"A stack of papers is a poor substitute for real

duty, sheriff," said the citizen sternly. "I trust that we'll have no further trouble about this boy?"

The sheriff shrugged his shoulders. "I'm through with the whole business," he said. "It is up to you. I just want these soldier boys to understand that they have been interfering too much with things on the Ridge. I want them to mind their own business."

"The only interfering that we have done, sir," said Jordan, turning to the man who had pushed himself forward for them, "was to look for someone who has prowled around our camp and who stampeded our horses."

"I see," nodded the man. "Well, I guess that will be all, sheriff."

Muttering to himself the unpopular sheriff slunk off, casting a baleful glance in the direction of the cadets. Once more the people crowded around the cadets, to shake hands and talk to them. Jordan thanked Mr. Morley for his help.

"I wouldn't have relished spending a night in jail," he smiled.

"I wouldn't have allowed you to stay there," said the citizen, promptly. "I'm afraid that our sheriff is not the best in the world."

It was late before the cadets got away from their many new friends and began the march back to camp. On the way they discussed the events of

the evening and agreed that they had escaped cheaply.

"If that Mr. Morley hadn't been there, the sheriff would have had his way and put you in the jail all night," Don said. "But I guess that man Morley is some leader in local politics and has enough influence to see to it that the sheriff minds when he is told to do something. If it wasn't for men like Morley some of these small, would-be important fellows would step out of bounds all the time."

"I guess I was a little too soon in offering to toss the sheriff down the stairs," grinned Terry, sheepishly. "He could have locked me up for offering violence to an officer of the law in the performance of his duty. But he got me so ripping mad when he grabbed Jordan!"

"That kind of resistance wouldn't get us anywhere," observed Jim, practically.

"Anyway, there is one young man who is the hero of the occasion," cried Thompson, as they dipped down toward the camp. "Bugler Howes, the medal goes to you!"

"Not at all, just lucky I happened to have the thing with me," murmured the cadet bugler.

"Lucky you had presence of mind enough to blow it, you mean," retorted Douglas. "Not one of us moved until you tooted that 'To Post' call. That

woke us up and we got to work. You are a real hero, my boy."

It was noon of the following day before the colonel learned any of the particulars of what had happened the night before. At that time three citizens from Rideway called upon him and told of the prompt service rendered by the cadets in the town hall. The bugler came in for the chief praise and mention was made of the sheriff's attitude. When the visitors had gone the colonel called in Jordan and heard the story from his senior leader. While the story was a whole lot more modest as related by Jordan, it was the same, and Howes was praised warmly.

"Your attitude regarding the sheriff was perfectly correct," the colonel assured the captain. "I am more proud of you than I can express in words. The bugler shall be rewarded in a fitting way."

On the following day, much to the amazement of Howes, he was called before the battalion after inspection and decorated with the school medal for "presence of mind in the face of sudden emergency." Blushing and happy, the stout bugler received the congratulations of the battalion afterward.

Those who had not gone to the play expressed their admiration of the ones who had served in the emergency at the town hall. To the surprise of the cadets who had been there, Rowen blandly took his

share of the praise. A group of them were standing around the mess tent awaiting the evening meal, when a young cadet spoke to Rowen regarding the affair.

"Well, there wasn't so much to it," returned Rowen, carelessly. "Just a matter of using your head, Tom. That's what we are trained to do here, you know."

"This is too much for me," muttered Terry, seeing that the colonel was not around. "Gentlemen!" he called, walking to a low tree. "I want to illustrate how Mr. Rowen worked in the crises which arose last evening. I wouldn't think of showing you, only I have observed that Mr. Rowen is taking dishonest credit. You see this limb? This represents the second story window in the town hall. I am Mr. Rowen—for the time being. The lights have gone out and it looks as though someone will step on my corns in the dark. So——"

With that the mischievous red-head went through the motions of scrambling out of a window, flopping over the branch, hanging and dropping. The cadets laughed at the figure he cut and Rowen's bubble was broken.

"You think you're smart, Mackson," cried the cadet. "But if I don't fix you good before camp breaks up I don't know why."

"You brought in on yourself, Rowen," returned

Terry. "One of the first to run away, and now you are hogging the credit. You can't get away with that, you know."

The colonel came around the tent and the cadets prepared to go inside. But Lieutenant Thompson, who had been looking across the Ridge called them to a halt.

"Gentlemen, I believe that someone is sending us a wig-wag message from that hill!" was his startling word.

They swung toward the distant hill. Far up at the top two tiny white flags moved in the semaphore signal. Whoever was doing it knew his business and they stared in fascination as the flags moved steadily.

"He is repeating his message, gentlemen," said the colonel, in the silence that had settled over them. "Be sure and get it this time."

The camp was perfectly silent as they strained their eyes to read the wig-wag message. When it finished a burst of excitement and amazement followed. For the mysterious flagman had signaled unmistakably: "Be on your guard. The Ghost walks tonight!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SHAPE IN THE MOONLIGHT

GREAT was the astonishment as the cadets made out the signal from the opposite side of the hill. At least nine-tenths of them had read the message accurately, for a knowledge of signaling, both in the Morse code and the semaphore, was required at the school. But after the message was received they stood staring toward the hill, looking for some further word. But after the same message had been repeated three times the colonel awoke to the fact that the signalman was not going to say anything more.

"Mr. Walker," he called, to the best signalman that the corps had. "Get your flags and answer 'All right.' "

Cadet Walker departed on a run to his tent, to reappear shortly with two white flags. Placing himself in a spot where he would surely be seen by the lone signalman, the cadet began his message. The flags on the other side of the Ridge disappeared at once as the man read their signal, and Walker stopped his rapid arm movements.

"Now, what in the world do you make of that?" Terry asked, in amazement. His question was taken up by all of the cadets and asked without any satisfactory answer. Supper was neglected while the mystery was considered, and the colonel was as much puzzled as the boys were.

At a signal from the headmaster, however, the bugler blew mess call and they went to their evening meal. The tables buzzed with speculative talk, and many were for going over to that hill and finding out who it could have been that signaled them. But when the meal was over the colonel rapped for order and when the tent had become quiet he spoke to them of the future plans.

"I know as little about that signal as you do, gentlemen" he said. "But I believe it to be sincere. Some one who is friendly, perhaps one of the persons who were present at the town hall at the time of the panic, is trying to give us a warning that may stand us in good stead. It is also possible that it may be a hoax, simply designed to fool us or to draw us out of camp. That will not happen, you may be sure, but I feel that we should be ready for duty. I shall split the battalion in half, and one-half of you will patrol the Ridge and the other half will remain in camp to guard it against surprise."

There was a stirring and a ripple of genuine pleasure at the news, for all of the young men looked

forward to some exciting times ahead. Even a prospect of something unusual pleased them. Each one was wishing that he would be lucky enough to be in the group that would patrol the Ridge.

"I wish to make this statement, which is also an order," went on the colonel. "There will be no carrying of arms tonight. Some one of you might become excited and fire at the wrong time, so I expressly forbid it. It is not as though you were going out alone, but you are going out in groups and therefore a weapon, in the shape of a firearm, won't be necessary. I trust that five or six husky young cadets will be a match for the best ghost this Ridge can send against us. It may be that we will have our supreme chance to lay this ugly ghost business tonight, and if so I want no slips that will damage the prospect. I wish to see the leaders immediately after the meal."

When the colonel met with the leaders he specified which cadets were to go out and which ones were to stay at camp. To their joy all of the friends of Don and Jim were to patrol the Ridge. The colonel had suggested that the Ghost Patrol go in a body, so the members of that secret organization prepared to go out alone. The leaders passed from group to group, telling them where to go and how to act, signals were arranged, and the stage was set. But

to the waiting cadets it seemed that evening was unusually slow in coming.

It being summer the days were long and the evenings well lighted. No attempt was made to slip out of camp until full darkness had settled down, for if anyone was watching it would be a risky thing to do. All of them wished the ghost to walk that night, and so, although they fretted at the delay, they stuck it out. The sun sank slowly over the countryside and the dusk began to turn to darkness.

"Never saw a day last so long in my life," grumbled Vench, digging his heel into the soft mud.

"It is just about the usual length, I guess," smiled Don. "One thing is going to be for and against us tonight."

"What is that?" the others asked.

"There will be just enough of a moon to make us have to be careful, and just enough to help us spot the ghost if he gets out into the open."

Jordan appeared from the direction of the tent and stopped at the various groups to give some sort of an order. When he got to them he repeated it finally.

"When we leave the camp we are to leave by the back way, taking care to keep out of the light of the fires," he told them. "It is possible that someone is watching the camp and our game would be spoiled if we walked out in such a way that it could

be seen. In about a half hour we will be able to get going."

"The bunch in camp will have to keep their eyes wide open," said Douglas.

"Yes, and the colonel will be helping them do it. We have to be careful that this isn't all some deep game to pull us out of camp while somebody with kindly ideas rushes in and burns the place out. The colonel has arranged this signal: three rifle shots for a recall. That will mean trouble in the camp, and if you hear it, dig for camp as fast as you can go."

"Yes, no telling what kind of a game this is," agreed Don.

The stars appeared faintly in the summer sky and the slice of the moon cut the distant horizon. The dusk had now turned to real darkness and the night was at hand. One group broke up and disappeared back of the tents and another followed. Jordan got up.

"All right, let's go," he announced, glancing at his watch. "Slip out of camp and mum's the word. Keep to the shadows."

The group in the tent broke up at once, some of them walking down the company street for a distance of three or four tents and then slipping behind them. Once out of the glare of the several camp fires they had no trouble in gaining the shelter

of the trees, and after a few seconds they were all together.

"Which direction now?" Jim asked.

"Let's go clear to the top of the Ridge," suggested Jordan. "From there we can get a comprehensive view of the woods and hills and spot anything that moves."

"What signal, in case we run into other patrols?" Vench wanted to know.

"The regular school whistle. No one outside of the corps knows that, so we can't go wrong on it."

They set out for the top of the Ridge, walking with care and listening for every sound that might break the stillness. They had not gone far before there was a noise as though someone was moving before them. Spreading out in a fan shape they bore silently down on the spot from which the noise had come, to run into another patrol which was laying low and waiting for them to come forward.

"Oh, it is only you fellows!" grunted Jordan, as Cadets Perry, Noxan, Dodge and Orlan confronted them.

"Yes, sorry to disappoint you by not being the ghost!" grinned Perry. "But we heard you threshing along and we took to cover, so that you would run into us. I'm afraid that we'll be doing that all evening, gentlemen."

"Well, then let's get over it by giving the school

whistle every time," suggested Don. "If we had whistled then you would have replied and we would have passed you in another direction."

"A good idea, Mercer," approved Dodge. "If we give the whistle and fail to receive the answer, we'll know that the party before us is a suspicious case. We can then dig after them in earnest."

"Yes, that will be satisfactory," nodded the senior captain. "We are striking off here, gentlemen. See you later."

With that they left the party and continued their journey to the top of the hills. They made the rest of the trip without encountering anyone else and paused on the top of the highest hill. From there they could look all along the Ridge, and even see the faint gleam of their own camp fires in the distance. There was no sign of life on the Ridge, but that was no argument in itself, for they knew that directly below them several bands of cadets were moving around.

"For the time being at least we will just stay here and sweep the hills with our eyes," Jordan said.

They were well sheltered in the darkness of some tall trees and there was no danger that anyone would see them or approach them unseen. For a full hour they sat under a tree and looked searchingly at the slopes below them, but in that time the only life they saw were the forms of several cadets who ap-

peared briefly in the open and then were lost in the darkness. At the end of the time they became highly impatient at the inaction.

"I guess there is nothing to be gained by sitting here," Jordan said. "My suggestion is that we split up and move along the top of the Ridge in opposite directions. Suppose Terry, Jim and Don come with me, and Thompson, Douglas and Vench group together and go toward the east of the Ridge? We'll work back past the camp."

"Sounds as good as anything," nodded Thompson. "Most of our fellows are content to stay down on the slopes, so it wouldn't be a bad idea to keep to the top."

"Yes, and I just happened to think of this phase," put in Terry. "You three are going toward the town. Why not keep an eye on that side of the Ridge and see if this ghostly gentleman doesn't come up from town, if he comes at all."

"There may be something in that," said Jordan. "We'll watch this side of the hill. By the way, have all of you fellows got your cadet whistles?"

All of them had the regular whistles, similiar to those used by the traffic policemen in the larger cities. "If you fellows get into a scrape and need help, just blow like old sixty," commanded Jordan. "If we should run into anything we'll do the same."

With this word they separated, the three going

toward the town and the other four going back along the Ridge above the camp. They were now so high above the camp that the fires gleamed like little fireflies below them.

"Somebody or something moving in the bushes below!" called Jim, suddenly. He pointed into a small gully below them and they looked down. The bushes, clearly seen in the pale moonlight, were moving.

"I'll whistle," said Jordan, and did so. But there was no reply.

"Down we go, and see who it is," decided the captain, and they crept forward like so many Indians, careful to make as little noise as possible. But when they dipped down in the gully they found four cadets, one of whom was Rowen. These cadets were standing like statues, evidently a bit scared and waiting to see who it was that moved toward them.

"Didn't you fellows hear my whistle?" Jordan demanded.

"We thought we heard someone whistle," returned Cadet Motley. "But we weren't sure."

"Well, I whistled," Jordan said. "Whenever you hear that you'll know that friends are nearby. If you fellows hear any noise just whistle, and if you don't get any answer then investigate."

"All right," nodded Motley. "What time have you, Jordan? I'm not sure about my time-piece."

Jordan drew out his watch. "I have just eleven o'clock, Motley," he replied. "I guess——"

Jim gripped his arm. "Siss—s!" he hissed. "Look, on the top of the Ridge!"

With one accord they looked up the slope and their blood chilled. In a patch of moonlight a weird and terrible figure walked swiftly from one patch of darkness toward another. It looked to be the figure of a man, clothed entirely in white, but it looked neither to the right nor to the left, but strode swiftly along, to all intents and purposes unaware that anyone save itself was on the Ridge. Even the head was muffled in white and showed no trace of eyes, nose or mouth. Quiet and evil and sinister it looked as it glided past the dark background of the sky.

CHAPTER XIX

DISOBEDIENCE LOSES THE GAME

WITHOUT a single word being spoken the cadets instinctively crouched down where they stood. It seemed to be the proper thing to do, although the ghostly figure had not looked in their direction. It had not looked in any direction except straight ahead, if it did look at all, and it seemed to know perfectly where to go.

The moment was one of indecision. While the ghost kept in plain sight on the top of the Ridge they were content to watch it, waiting for a cue that would send them into action. To attempt to rush up the hill and grapple with the shape would be the wrong thing to do, for the noise of their approach would start the thing into a run. To trail it as quietly as possible was the thought in mind of each one of them.

There was a stir on the part of one of the cadets, the one nearest Don. He reached into his inside pocket and then brought his hand out into the open. It was Dick Rowen who had moved and Don shifted his eyes toward him.

What he saw startled him. Against all orders to the contrary the sulky cadet had brought a revolver with him. He was even now raising it and pointing toward the white shape.

Don's arm described a sort of arc, his hand coming down with a thump on the wrist of the unpopular cadet. But Rowen had a good grip on the stock of his revolver.

"Put that away, Rowen," Don whispered, sternly.

"Leave me alone, Mercer," hissed the other. "I'm just going to scare the thing."

Don's grasp tightened and he jerked the wrist toward him. Rowen promptly twisted his arm, pointing the revolver upward. The grasp of his fingers on the trigger was too strong and the revolver went off with a shattering report.

There was a moment of utter silence from the boys themselves. The figure in white leaped into the air and then began a swift run along the top of the Ridge. Don had dropped Rowen's wrist in dismay and the other cadet was shaken by the unexpected happening.

"Oh, you confounded chump!" cried Don, as the ghost could be heard running along the rise.

They were all on their feet now and Jordan pushed up to them. He grasped the cadet by the arm.

"Rowen, what in the world did you do that for?" he ground out.

"I didn't do it," defended the other. "Mercer grabbed my arm."

"That's all right, but we all saw what you did. It was against the colonel's orders to carry any kind of a gun. Why did——"

Don cut in. "Some of you fellows get after the ghost on the double-quick!" he cried, and Terry, Jim, and the others ran off, leaving him alone with Jordan and the angry one.

"Well, I thought the colonel was foolish about not carrying arms," said Rowen, as the others breasted the rise. "Anyway, what right had he to send us out to face some kind of a desperate man, maybe a criminal, without any way to protect ourselves? I wasn't going to shoot the man, I was going to scare him."

"You succeeded in doing that without carrying out your original plan," Jordan returned, grimly. "Now, Mr. Rowen, I want you to march yourself back to camp and put yourself on report. You are under arrest."

"Oh, sure, I could expect that from you!" retorted Rowen, bitterly.

"Yes, you could, or anyone else who had pulled a stunt like that," nodded Jordan. "It was direct and defiant disobedience, and if we lose our chance to nab the ghost it will be entirely your fault. Return to camp at once, Mr. Rowen."

"Very well," grumbled the disagreeable one, and he walked sullenly away.

"Now, if we are going to catch up with the boys we'll have to put all we have into it," announced Jordan.

"Right!" said Don, as they started up the slope. "Feel equal to a good stiff run?"

"Just right," smiled Jordan. "Let's hit a steady pace."

Gaining the top of the rise they fell into a steady run along the top, away from the camp and toward the town on the far side of the Ridge. They were following a general direction, which was not entirely blind, for far ahead of them they heard a faint cracking sound that seemed to be made by someone running recklessly. Their route did not keep them long on the top of the hill, for the ghost had taken to the deeper shelter of the trees lower down and they plunged down the slope, threading their way in between the trees.

They almost fell over a figure that was before them in the woods. It was Cadet Owens, and he was sitting on a rock, hugging his foot. His shoe was off and he was breathing hard.

"Hurt yourself?" Jordan sang out.

"Not much," gasped Owens. "Got my shoe caught in a piece of rock and it threw me down and twisted my ankle. But I'll be able to walk. Keep

on going straight ahead. We didn't lose sight of him."

The other two plunged on, following a straight line. They did not expect to overtake the others, for Terry and Jim in particular were fast runners and they had obtained a good start. All they could hope to do was to be in at the finish if there was a finish, and with this in mind they ran on.

"Stiff pace!" gasped Don, as they began to ascend a second rolling hill.

"Nothing else but!" returned Jordan, running steadily.

On the top of the hill they found themselves in familiar country. Far ahead of them was the tiny cabin of the old cripple, Peter Vancouver, and above them was the big, barn-like house that they had observed at the time they first took the hike to the cripple's place. Now they were somewhat at a loss, and slowed up a bit in their running.

"We'll have to be careful not to lose them now," Don said.

"There they are, right ahead of us," announced Jordan. "They must have lost him, because they are standing still."

"They are right in front of that old house," observed Don, as they ran forward.

The others were indeed standing outside the gate of the old house on the hill, catching their breath

and looking at the dark structure. They turned in glad surprise when the two ran up.

"It's Don and Jordan," Jim told the others.

"Did you lose him?" Jordan called, as they joined them.

"He just bolted into that house," Terry answered. "Think we ought to go in after him?"

"Absolutely," was the reply from the senior captain. "All you fellows have your flashes, haven't you?"

They all had. Jordan led the way inside the gate and they walked with great care toward the house.

"He was 'way ahead of us," said Motley, "and just as soon as he got to this old house he bolted right inside. I don't know whether he is armed or not, so we had better be careful."

"Yes," replied Jordan. "But if he is in the house we are bound to get him. Be ready to put your light out if he tries any shooting. And be careful of holes or anything in the house."

They snapped on their flashlights as they went up the tottering old porch. The house had at one time been a fine old mansion, but it had evidently stood idle for years. There were no windows in the place which could boast of glass, and the front door had dropped from its hinges and now lay sprawled out on the porch. Jordan swung his light down on this prostrate door, and they could see that

it was covered with dirt and mud. Newer marks on the door showed that someone had recently entered the place.

"This is where he went, all right," said Don. "On your toes, everybody."

Before entering the place they flashed brilliant beams of light in every corner of the nearest room. This was a large hall, with bare walls from which the plaster had fallen, and a large staircase running up to a second floor. Realizing that the ghost might leave the place by some rear door while they prowled around the front rooms, the cadets pushed the search with all possible speed, their eyes and ears alert for any sign of someone lurking. But a rapid search of a wide parlor, a square dining room, and an enormous kitchen showed them that at least in the downstairs no one was concealed.

"I guess our next move will be the upstairs," Motley suggested, and they took the wide steps toward the top of the house.

Here there were a number of smaller rooms and it took them some little time to look through all of them. They were all large bedrooms, with big, deep closets, and considerable care was exercised in poking into the closets. Nothing was to be found on the second floor, and with more confidence they went to the third floor. This was a big barn-like attic, and was absolutely empty of any life.

"Well, if he is in the place at all, it is the cellar," decided Jordan, when they had satisfied themselves that there was no one in the upper part of the house. "I don't think he came upstairs at all, because I don't see any prints."

There were some footprints in the lower hall but they were lost on the comparatively bare stretches of floor. The cadets descended to the lower floors and went to the cellar, finding the steps leading down to be decidedly shaky. The cellar, which extended only a short distance under the house, was tenanted by spiders only, and no one had been in there, judging by the huge webs that stretched across the bottom of the stairway. It would have been impossible for anyone to have gone that way without breaking the webs, and they were all in excellent order.

"Many thanks to the spiders," acknowledged Terry, lifting his hat. "They make it possible for us to keep from going any deeper into this damp hole. The smell of it is enough for me."

"Just to be on the right side of things," said Jordan, "suppose we go out back and see if there is an outside cellar door? This ghost may have run out the back door of the house and down a back stairs to the cellar. I'm not going to give up the search until I have seen in every corner of the house."

"While a couple of us are doing that I suggest that two or three of us look in the closets on the first floor," Don advanced. "We missed them on our first round. I guess a couple of us can hold the ghost in a tussle until the others get on the spot."

"All right," said Jordan. "Jim and Motley, come with me. The rest of you scatter. But I'm pretty sure that the ghost ran right on through the house and escaped into the woods."

The others thought the same thing, but they scattered to search. Terry and Cadet Ross began to look into the closets on the first floor. Don wandered back into the parlor and came to the front porch. From there he looked off over the hills, seeing below him the lights in the cabin of the cripple.

"I wonder if old Mr. Vancouver is all right?" Don mused. "Maybe he heard the noise we made and is alarmed. It isn't far to his house, and I think I'll run down and see if he is all right. Won't take a second, and I'll be right back."

CHAPTER XX

DAWNING LIGHT

WITH this kindly thought in mind Don jumped to the ground and started off. But at that moment Terry appeared in the black doorway.

"Hey, where are you going?" the red-head asked.

"Just going to run down and see if that old cripple is all right," called back Don. "Tell Jordan that I'll be right back."

"All right, my boy," Terry returned. "If you run into any trouble, just sing out and we'll come on the jump."

Terry turned back and was lost to sight while Don resumed his journey down the slope. The cabin of the cripple was not far away and it took him but a moment to reach it. He approached it from the back, hoping to get a look in one of the windows, but they were too high and small in the rear and so he passed around to the front of the cabin. Noiselessly he crossed the porch and tapped on the door, waiting for an answer.

Although he waited there was no response and he wondered if the old man was asleep. But as there

was a light showing he rather doubted that and he knocked again, a trifle louder. The light came out from under the door and showed around the windows that opened off the porch, but he was unable to peer in because heavy black shades were pulled down to the bottom. The front door was solid and he found no help in that direction.

"He must be asleep, in spite of the light," Don decided. "I'll see if I can see anything through the side windows."

He made his way around the side of the house and found that he could see in a window there. A ragged shade had been pulled down but the torn edges gave him a limited view of the interior of the large room. It was lighted by a single oil lamp that burned on the table, and in a far corner, in his chair, sat the cripple, apparently fast asleep. At least he was very quiet and Don was undecided.

"Don't know as I ought to tap, but I'll just see if he is awake," he decided, and tapped with his ring on the glass in the window. The cripple stirred in his chair, looked toward the window, and wheeled his chair out of the shadow.

"Who is it?" he cried, in a shrill voice.

Don ran swiftly around the porch and placed his lips near to the door frame. "It is Don Mercer, one of the cadets who visited you that afternoon," he called. "May I come in?"

"Sure, you may," responded the cripple, instantly. There was a soft sound, like the rolling of wheels, and the catch on the door rattled. In an instant the door swung open to show the frail figure in the chair. Don was bathed in a yellow light that blinded him for a moment.

"Come right in," invited Vancouver, spinning back from the door. "Close the door and make yourself right at home. What brings you up here at this hour?"

Don entered, closing the door back of him, and looked around the room. A fire snapped in an open hearth and the room was a bit too warm. The cripple was wrapped in a brown blanket, and he had wheeled himself back into the shadows beyond the lamp light.

"I'll have to apologize for my late call, Mr. Vancouver," laughed Don. "But a bunch of us chased the ghost up this way and the rest of the boys are looking for him. I saw your lights down here and just ran in to see if you were all right, or if our noise had in any way alarmed you."

"You was chasin' the ghost!" cried the cripple, sharply. "Go 'way!"

"Yes, a bunch of us saw him walking along the Ridge and we gave him chase," Don explained. "We chased him into that old house on the top of the hill and we went all through the place but couldn't find him. While the others were looking I ran down

here to see if you had heard anything. Sorry to have bothered you."

"Wasn't no bother at all, and I'm grateful to you for your thought," responded Vancouver, promptly. "I didn't hear anything because I been sleepin' here in the chair. Your knock woke me up. So you saw the ghost, eh? What did he look like?"

Don described the appearance of the ghost and the old man appeared to be deeply interested. When the cadet had finished the old man asked a question.

"You say you fellows saw him. How'd you come to do that? You ain't always out of your camp so late as this, be you?"

Seeing that the cripple was deeply interested and feeling that he might some day help them to find the ghost Don related the story of the mysterious flagman, the search on the hill and the revolver shot that Rowen had fired off.

"Sho, too bad about that shot," said the cripple, shaking his head. "If it hadn't been for that you would have nailed this ghost, eh?"

"No doubt of it," said Don, his attention attracted by something that the man was doing. "Are you too hot, Mr. Vancouver?"

The cripple had been passing a hand jerkily across his forehead several times, and each time after the act he wiped a somewhat dampened hand on the brown cover. Although it was quite warm in the

place it did not seem to be hot enough to make a man sweat, unless the cripple was the kind who perspired easily. It seemed to Don that the old man was breathing pretty heavily for one who had sat in the wheel chair all evening, and in the boy's brain a faint idea stirred. He rejected it instantly, but like a gentle knocking it persisted.

"Oh, no, no," hastily interposed the cripple. "Do you feel too warm?"

"No, but I thought perhaps you might be a little hot, and I'd open a window or the door for you," responded Don, seating himself on the edge of the table.

"No, you needn't do that," said the man, running one thumb absently along the edge of the nearest wheel. The glance that he fixed on the cadet's face was keen and almost fierce. "I'm so old I got to keep warm, because I don't move around enough."

"I see," nodded Don. He had intended to leave immediately, but found himself suddenly possessed with a desire to remain. "Well, as I was telling you, we chased that ghost into the old house above you. Know anything about the place?"

At the same time Don began a rigid inspection of the cripple. Most of the man was covered up, but his feet showed under the blanket. Only the toes could be seen, but there was something about them that attracted his attention. They were clothed

in socks which seemed to be damp, and he wondered if the man always went without shoes.

Vancouver knew the place well. "They used to call that the haunted house, around here," he chuckled. "This Ridge is a pretty spooky place, the more you hear of it. You don't know who it was that sent you that flag message, eh?"

"Haven't the least idea," answered Don. "All of the cadets were in camp at the time, and I don't know who around here knows how to use signal flags. And who would know that the ghost was going to walk?"

"You beat me there," the cripple said, shaking his head. "That's a hard nut to crack. Maybe the ghost went in for a little advertisin'."

"I doubt it, Mr. Vancouver," said Don, noting that the fire was consuming fresh wood which couldn't have been put there an hour ago. "If you had seen the ghost run you'd have known that the thing was utterly unexpected to him. It is a pretty tough problem."

"I guess most ghost doin's are tough problems," grinned the old man.

"I guess so," Don smiled. "Nice fire you have there. We don't see many open hearth fires any more. Have you had it going all evening?"

"Yep, I generally have it going every evening," responded the cripple, somewhat absently. A sec-

ond glance told Dan that the fire was not an hour old. He got up from the table.

"Well, I'll have to be running along, Mr. Vancouver," he said, glancing at his watch. "I don't want to keep you at an hour like this. I just wanted to run down and see if any of our noise had alarmed you, but as long as it hasn't, why, I'll be moving."

"I didn't hear a sound, so I'm all right," smiled the cripple. "It was real nice of you to drop down to see if I was all right, and I sure appreciate that. An old cripple like me doesn't get much chance to see the world or talk with anyone, so it did me good to have you stop in."

"That's fine," replied Don, his eyes busy at the task of looking around the room in a guarded manner. "By the way, Mr. Vancouver, as I told you before, we had quite a bit of running tonight. Consequently, I'm just about burning up with thirst, and I'm thinking with pleasure that you have some of the finest water I ever tasted here."

"I'll get you a drink in just a shake," promised the cripple, seizing his wheel.

"Don't bother. Can't I get it myself?" asked Don, wishing to gain a look at the kitchen.

"Won't take me a second," said the other, and spun around in his chair, aiming at the doorway that led into the back room. With the speed and

accuracy of an arrow he passed through it and was gone.

And almost immediately Don thanked his lucky stars that he had not been permitted to go out into the other room himself. For something that had been hidden by the chair of the cripple was now disclosed. In the corner rested a pair of shoes, and these shoes were covered with mud!

Not the slightest doubt about it. Red and black mud, soft and wet, a fact that he could determine without touching them. A band of light from the lamp shone on them and revealed the evidence plainly. That explained the damp socks of the cripple. Yet Don's brain was unable to fully take it all in.

"Is it possible that this man is not a cripple after all? Or has the real ghost been here, and maybe is hiding here right now? That may be possible."

But certain things pointed an unerring hand at the cripple. His brow was moist, as of one who had been running. His breath had been rapid, and now his muddy shoes betrayed him. Some big game was in the wind, for not an instant longer did Don doubt that the man could walk and run, and the crippled state was nothing but a ruse. Light was beginning to dawn on him rapidly.

"No wonder he pumped me about who it was that sent the wig-wag," he thought, as the sound of water was heard from the kitchen pump. "While

I have been sitting here telling him everything he has been measuring me, wondering if I have been playing some sort of a game with him. Maybe I'm lucky that he didn't jump on me suddenly, but I believe that my straightforward story has convinced him that I don't know anything. Nothing dumb about him, evidently! My story about running down to see if he is all right must sound pretty flat, though."

The cripple wheeled into the room rapidly and in his hand he had a tall glass of water. Don drank it eagerly, keeping a wary eye on the old man, but nothing out of the way happened and he thanked him for the water.

"Don't mention it," smiled the man. "Come up again and see me, won't you?"

"I surely will," promised Don, as he opened the door. "Good night, sir."

"Good night, boy, good night," was the bright and cheery response, as Don went out.

"If he isn't a cripple, he certainly knows how to run that chair of his," Don decided, as he ran up the hill.

He found that the others were waiting for him impatiently. "Good night, we thought that you were lost," said Jordan, impatiently.

"No, just talking with that old cripple," said Don. "Didn't have any luck, eh?"

"Not a bit," returned the senior captain. "Well, I suppose we may as well head in."

It did not take them long to make camp, where they found the others awaiting them. Jordan reported to the colonel, who had heard the shot and who knew from Rowen's own report what had happened. Howes was ordered to blow the bugle as a sign of recall, and before very long all of the groups had returned.

"Too bad we lost him," said the colonel, shaking his head. "I believe it was entirely due to Mr. Rowen's disobedience. I have ordered him into permanent arrest, until I decide what to do with him. Sound taps, Mr. Howes."

Don thought deeply before falling asleep. "I guess I'll keep things to myself, at least for a time," he decided. "It all sounds so far-fetched that I hate to trot out my discoveries. But that cripple was surely out of his chair and out of his house this night! Now that I have something definite to work on something tangible may come up before long. The next thing we had better do is to find out who that mysterious flagman was."

CHAPTER XXI

LISTENING IN

ON THE following morning the cadets were in the mess tent enjoying a hearty breakfast when a young man who was a complete stranger to them showed up at the tent entrance.

He was a fairly good looking young fellow, well set up, with a handsome smile and the air of knowing pretty much what he was doing. He looked around the tent, apparently indifferent to the looks of inquiry cast in his direction, and then rested his glance on the table where the colonel and the instructors were eating. He walked to that table and spoke aloud.

"Well, gentlemen, what luck did you have with the ghost last night?" he smiled.

There was a pause before anyone answered him. Then the colonel rose in his place.

"Unfortunately, we missed him, after a considerable chase," he answered, while all eating was suspended as the cadets listened. "Are you the one who—?"

"Yes, I sent you the wig-wag," nodded the young

man. "I am a scoutmaster over in Rideway and that's how I happen to know the signals. I've always wanted to put this stupid ghost out of business, and I was on the Ridge last night myself, looking around, but unfortunately did not run across the creature."

"How did you come to find out that the ghost was going to walk, Mr.—?" began the colonel.

"My name is Benson," smiled the other. "I'll tell you how I came to learn that the nuisance was about to walk. In the nighttime, between 1 a. m. and 8 a. m., I am employed as a telephone operator on the local switchboard. Those are somewhat lonely hours and I do not have many calls to take care of, but there are a few, and so an operator is necessary.

"I do not often listen in to conversations. You might think it would be lots of fun to do so, but one becomes as tired of that as the candy clerk becomes of eating his own wares. Only once in a great while do I ever open a key and listen to a message, and you may be aware that I am bound strictly to keep my mouth closed concerning every message that goes over a line, or I'll suffer to the tune of a cool thousand dollar fine. So it was just by an accident that I ran across a conversation yesterday morning that told me that the ghost was going to walk, and that your camp was soon to feel the wrath of the prowler."

The colonel pushed a vacant chair toward the visitor. "Sit down, Mr. Benson," he ordered. When the young scoutmaster had done so the colonel resumed his seat. The tent was absolutely quiet, even the cooks listening intently. Benson smiled at the interest his conversation had aroused.

"About seven o'clock in the morning a call came on the long distance wire for the one and only drug store in Rideway," Benson went on. "Calls for the drug store are not unusual, and only slightly more interesting than others. I connected the line to the drug store and rang them. Then, forgetting to close my key more than anything else, I listened while the receiver was picked up at the drug store. I remember being pretty sleepy at the time and of hardly paying intelligent attention to what was being said.

"The clerk at the store said, 'Hello, Empire Drug Store, Rose speaking.' That's about the way they always answer there. The party on the other end said, 'You know who this is, Rose?' and the clerk said, 'Yes, sir.' Then I was knocked wide awake by hearing the party on the far end of the wire say: 'What are the latest activities, Rose? I know about the failure to burn Hyde's farm. Has the ghost walked since?' That staggered me and I put all the steam I had behind my listening power."

The cadets were doing the same thing. The story of the young scout leader held them all in stillness.

"The clerk Rose answered, 'No, sir, the ghost hasn't done anything since. Once he walked and there is some talk that he scared a little girl so that she strayed away from home for a few days, but those cadets who are camping at the Ridge found her. As a matter of fact, sir, those cadets are cramping the ghost at every turn. They put out the fire at Hydes and have been generally meddling. The ghost tried to stampede their horses, but didn't make out at it very well.'

"The voice at the other end was a low, cold sort of a voice, and I was trying to catch a clue from it, and hoping that the clerk would use a name, but he didn't, just kept using the title Sir. This voice at the other end said: 'I know all about those cadets interfering with the activities of the ghost, and I will attend to them personally very soon. When I do, they won't have so much as a tent left to them or a single horse! But I don't want the ghost to stay in just on account of those soldiers. Tell him to get moving again, and make it his business not to get caught. Do you understand?'

"Rose said that he did and the man on the other end hung up without saying goodbye. Rose hung up on his end. Quick as a flash I got the section operator on the wire and told her that I wanted the call traced. But I had waited too long. 'Do you know what number was calling you?' she asked. I

told her that I didn't, that I wanted to know, but she said she couldn't help me unless the wires were up at the time. So I had to give it up, but we have one shot left in the locker. I have not told you yet the most important part of the conversation over the wire. Just before they hung up their receivers the man at the far end of the wire told Rose to call him up at seven o'clock, or else he would call Rose, and report what the ghost had accomplished."

"Was that this morning?" the colonel cried.

"No, this man was not to be in town today, but that call is to be made at seven o'clock tomorrow morning. I have arranged with the district supervisor on the telephone board to catch that call. Just as soon as the conversation is over we will ring back along the line and find out who made it, or rather from which city it was made. I think we have a fair chance of nailing this ghostly gentleman now, and at least we can find out what future plans will be. Just as soon as I heard that conversation I thought of the threat against you and your camp, and I planned to warn you. It came to me that you'd surely know what wig-wag was, so I signalled you from the hill. But for a long time I thought you didn't know, until you flashed back."

"We must apologize to you, Mr. Benson," said the colonel. "We were so surprised at the unexpectedness of it all that it took us a few minutes to

answer you. But your information helped us tremendously, for we were on guard and very nearly caught the ghost."

"What were the details?" the scout leader asked. The colonel winced at having to tell about the carelessness and disobedience of one of his cadets, but feeling it only fair to tell the man everything he did so, carefully omitting Rowen's name.

"I heard the shot," nodded the leader. "I didn't know what it might mean, but I blamed it on the ghost. We blame most of everything on the ghost around here. My feeling in the whole matter is this: for some few years I have been a scoutmaster here and I have heard very little else except this silly ghost business. I find boys in my troop that believe implicitly in the thing, and it has just rubbed me raw to think that the thing can go on. Long ago I determined to see if I couldn't do something about it myself, and I have done considerable hunting but without accomplishing anything. It is rather complicated, as you can see for yourself. In the first place, the ghost is a hired man who works for someone in a distant city. He is subject to orders from the drug store clerk Rose and this man in the distance. The man is evidently thinking of coming here and burning you people out of your camp. I can't think what other plan he has in mind. What I want you to do is this: you and one or two of your

trusted officers come with me tonight, spend the night with me on the switchboard, and see if we can't trace this call in the morning!"

There was an eager stir at this, and every cadet hoped that he might be the one selected. The colonel nodded thoughtfully.

"I'll give that every thought, Mr. Benson," he affirmed. "Won't you sit in with us and have some breakfast? Drill begins very soon, and you may stay and watch that, if you care to."

"I've had my breakfast, thank you," smiled young Benson. "Just as soon as I have made some arrangements with you about spending the night on the switchboard I'll have to run along home and get some sleep. Been up all night, you know."

When drill sounded the cadets went to their stations in a flurry of excitement that did the drill no particular good. Benson remained to talk to the colonel and then left camp. Late in the afternoon Jordan, Don and Jim were ordered to the colonel's tent.

"Gentlemen," said the colonel. "I suggest that you try to get some sleep before midnight. I want you three to spend the night in the telephone room with Mr. Benson. I do not intend going myself, but I want you to go. You will be awakened at the proper time and you are to make your way into Rideway quietly, go to the building on the left of

the town hall, and there you will find Mr. Benson. Be careful about being seen going or coming, especially coming in the morning. I shall await your report in the morning."

The three lucky cadets went immediately to their tents to talk over the piece of good news. They ate supper and after an hour turned in, to sleep until midnight. Terry wailed at the fate that had left him out of it.

"Some fellows have all the luck," he lamented. "Confound these Mercer boys, anyway. Quoting Mr. Rowen, they get everything in the camp, and yet I don't see why they should. I've got the bigger ears, and the colonel should have sent me."

The Officer of the Guard awakened the boys at the proper hour and they left the camp, passing the sentries safely. It did not take them long to cross the Ridge and strike down into Rideway, which town they found totally deserted. Alongside of the town hall they found the building that housed the telephone boards and upon their knocking they were admitted by Benson, who was on duty at the time. He wore a telephone headset, consisting of the one 'phone, the curved mouthpiece that fastened to the soundbox which rested on his chest, and the long and detachable plug. He allowed them to come in and then locked the door.

"We don't want anybody to see that this is com-

pany night," he grinned. "This, gentlemen, is our local switchboard."

He proudly showed them a handsome board bearing scores of little white buttons that lighted up when the calls came in, and rows of multiple holes into which the plugs were inserted when calls were connected. He showed them the amazing number of wires that criss-crossed in the backs of the boards and worked the keys that rang the bells. He explained things in detail to them.

"This is what they call a manual board, as against a dial board," he said. "We have five girls working here in the daytime, but one operator is sufficient in the night. Now, all we have to do is to wait."

Then they got a fair insight to the night telephone operator's job. There was complete silence until two-thirty, when a call was received. Benson had provided them with head sets similar to his own, and they listened to the conversation between a bank in a larger city and the local postoffice, where one clerk was doing some work. When this conversation was over the time ticked on again. The one electric light burned steadily over the main switchboard.

"This certainly is a lonely job," remarked Jordan, around a quarter after three.

"Yes, but you get used to it after awhile," smiled

Benson. "Most of the time I sit here and doze, after I get tired of reading. Now, I guess it is time we had some coffee. That is the big event of the night."

From a locker Benson brought out a coffee pot, a small electric stove, and the necessary thing to go with it, and before long the smell of coffee was in the air. They enjoyed it while talking over various things. School life, scout work and many other things were discussed, and before long the dawn had broken in the east. Seven o'clock came, and there had been but two rings on the board.

They were in the midst of their conversation when the bell rang sharply. Looking toward the board they saw that a small red button had lighted up. Benson sprang up.

"That is long distance!" he said, excitedly. "This may be our call. Plug in!"

When they had done so Benson answered. "Hello?" he inquired.

"Let me have Main 7200," came a dull voice from the other end.

"Yes, sir," replied the telephone operator, and turned his key off. He fitted a connecting cord to a socket and nodded to the three tense cadets.

"This is our party," he whispered. "Now, to get the district operator!"

Before ringing the Main number Benson called

on a separate wire for the district supervisor. "This is the call I want traced, Miss Parks," he told her. "Will you come in on it?"

"Surely, Mr. Benson," said a pleasant voice, a trifle sleepily. Benson adjusted some wires and then rang the Main number.

"Now, whatever you do, be quiet," pleaded the operator. "If you have to cough or sneeze, turn off your key! If the fellow on the other end knows anyone is listening in he'll cut right off."

With that Benson opened the keys. The clerk at the drug store was just answering.

"Empire Drug Store, Rose speaking," the voice came over the wire.

"What have you to report, Rose?" the dull voice asked.

"The last walk was a failure, sir," replied the clerk. "Those cadets chased the ghost into the old Furmen house and very nearly caught him."

"Those meddling cadets again, eh?" purred the voice on the other end.

"Yes, Mr. Maul!" was the answer that sent a shock through the brains of the listening young men.

"Be careful of names, Rose," was the quick answer.

"Very well, sir," the clerk answered humbly. But

the boys had heard something that opened avenues of thought. All four of them looked triumphantly at each other. The name Maul was a big step in itself.

CHAPTER XXII

THE CLERK IS TRAILED

THE dull voice spoke again. "Don't waste any time worrying about those cadets, Rose," went on the man named Maul. "I am planning to pay them a visit soon that will fix them so they'll wish they had not come to Rustling Ridge. But I don't want the ghost to stay in just on account of them. Go to him this afternoon by the latest and tell him to start prowling on the far side of the Ridge. The more people who see him, and the more places he is seen in, the better for the cause. In about a week I will give you orders relative to another attempt to burn the Hydes out, but first I will get rid of those school-boy soldiers. Have you got that all straight, Rose?"

"Yes, sir. You want me to see the ghost this afternoon and give him orders to be seen a few miles away from here?"

"Yes, I want him seen in various parts of the Ridge. That will confuse people and make our game safer. See to everything as directed, Rose."

"Yes, sir," said the clerk. There was a click on the end of the wire and one nearer at hand. Benson

pulled the cord connecting the drug store and quickly buzzed the supervisor. Her voice reached them at once.

"Very well, Mr. Benson, I'm tracing that call, I heard every word of it, too. Just a moment and we'll get the originating operator."

The district supervisor had buzzed on the line as soon as Maul hung up and before the operator at the distant point had had a chance to wholly disconnect. The voice of the early morning operator now came to them.

"Operator," she called.

"Operator, this is the District Supervisor, Ocean County office," called back Miss Parks. "What office are you in, and what city?"

"City Exchange at Crossland," was the reply.

"There was just a call from your office to Rideway, was there not?" went on Miss Parks, as the boys listened.

"Yes, there was," was the reply.

"Do you know where the call came from?" the district supervisor asked.

"From a pay station, booth with the number Circle 7210," was the answer.

"Thank you," said the supervisor, and cut off the Crossland switchboard. She then addressed herself to Benson. "You got all of that, Mr. Benson?"

"Yes, and thank you kindly, Miss Parks," said

the night operator warmly. "We know the city, although the fact that the call was made from a public booth doesn't help much. A few of us are going to try hard to run this business that you heard down, Miss Parks, so I'll ask you to keep it to yourself for the time being."

"I'll be glad to help you by doing that, Mr. Benson," promised the supervisor. Benson thanked her and then disconnected. He swung off his headpiece.

"Well, this was one fine morning's work," he cried, his face alight with enthusiasm.

"You bet it is!" agreed Jim, with equal enthusiasm. "Now all that remains to be done is to trail that clerk."

"And I'll tell you just where he will go, too," said Don, calmly.

"Where?" the others demanded, in a breath.

"To the cabin of Peter Vancouver," returned Don.

"Why to him?" asked Jordan. "He's a cripple."

"My best uniform that he isn't," smiled Don. "Let me tell you what happened the night we chased the ghost." With that he related the story of the visit to the cripple. "I'm positive that he had been out that night, and I don't think for a minute that he is a cripple at all."

"How long has the man been living in that cabin?" Jordan asked Benson.

"Only for a few years, but everyone has put him down for a cripple," was the reply. "By George! now that I think of it, he only settled down there after the last Maul disappeared!"

"Surely," smiled Don. "Maul put this man there on purpose, and he is the ghost who is terrifying people. The plan is to make people think that there is a spirit on the Ridge, but the real aim is to gain revenge on the Hydes."

"And on us also," grinned Jordan.

"Yes," the scout master said. "Now, as to trailing this clerk: I think you had better leave that to me. I know him when I see him, and the sight of you fellows in uniform would spoil the game completely. But if you feel sure that the clerk is going to the cripple to give him Maul's orders suppose you watch the place from the hills with a field glass? In that way, if I should miss him you ought to be able to spot him going into the cabin, and we'll keep a firm check on what he does."

"A fine idea, Benson," approved Jordan. "Subject to Colonel Morrell's orders, we'll do it. I guess the clerk will be going up there this afternoon sometime, but we'll see if we can't get into spying position as early as possible.

"I think you had better," said the operator. "Now, gentlemen, in the interests of safety first I'll have to put you out. The daytime girls come on

before long and there would be sure to be curiosity if you were found here."

"Surely," Don replied. "How shall we go out? This town boasts of early risers, I see, so we'll have to be careful."

"I have thought that out," Benson said. "I won't attempt to let you out the front door, for too many people are likely to see you and raise questions. But I have a back door that will let you down an alley, where you can get onto a small street without arousing undue anxiety. We'll carry through our trailing program and after we make sure of things I'll come up to camp and see the colonel about what steps we ought to take."

"That's fine, Benson," returned Jordan. "I admire your spirit immensely. You could run this thing down alone and get all the credit for it yourself, but I believe you are doing the wiser thing by getting help."

"There is another question involved," smiled Benson. "While I was trying to cover myself with glory your camp might be burned out and your innocent horses injured or killed. That's the way I'm looking at it. Many a man hurts things by being selfish for glory."

"Fine spirit on your part," was Don's comment.

"Anyhow, there isn't likely to be much glory

gained on the Ridge," laughed Benson. "This is the way to the back door, fellows."

He led the way around in back of the telephone boards, revealing a kind of passageway between them and the back wall, and at the end of this place there was a small door. When it was opened they saw before them a narrow alley. Benson shook hands with each one of them.

"Best of luck to you and I'll see you later," he smiled, and the boys left him.

The alley took them out into a small lane that passed back of the main street and the boys left the town without having been seen by many of the early risers. They struck the trail for camp at a rapid pace.

"Good golly, I am hungry," sighed Jim, as they topped the rise.

"I guess we all are," replied Jordan. "But we have made splendid progress in the last few hours. What a rare piece of luck that a fellow like Benson is the night operator!"

"True enough, but isn't it strange how things work out?" Don reminded him. "Benson admits that hearing that first conversation was a pure accident. This morning the clerk slipped up and called the man on the other end, Maul, and just by accident we heard that. Honestly, the more I see of life the more I am convinced that no one can play

a dishonest game and get away with it forever."

"Our experiences have proved that more than once," murmured his brother.

They arrived in camp while drill was going on and reported at once to the colonel. He was interested and pleased beyond measure.

"That is splendid work, gentlemen," he approved, heartily. "Now, some of you must do some active trailing."

Jordan then told him of Benson's idea and the colonel saw the wisdom of it at once. "I suppose you three feel equal to the observation task, don't you?" he smiled.

"We will after we have had some breakfast, sir," Don smiled back.

"Of course. Report to the mess tent and put away as big a meal as you like. Pack something up to take with you and then get your field glasses and find a post from which you can watch the cabin of this supposed cripple. I compliment you on your fine powers of observation regarding this Peter Vancouver, Don."

"Thank you, sir," acknowledged Don. "It is a clever game all the way through, and only lucky accidents have put us in touch with the truth."

"Yes, the kind of accidents that you boys seem to have," said the colonel, dryly. "Well, run along to your breakfast."

After a hearty meal the three officers packed some sandwiches and went to their tents, where they procured side arms and field glasses. All of the officers of the corps were required to have glasses, and they slung them on their shoulders. Then they hiked once more for the top of the Ridge.

"We're having all the fun," grinned Jim. "Won't old red-head pull his hair out in handfulls when he hears of this!"

A small clump of bushes on a high hill gave them a good view of the cripple's cabin when sighted through the glasses and there was no danger that they would be seen in turn. The morning passed without any sign of anything moving and they ate their lunch under a hot sun.

"He surely ought to show up this afternoon," Jordan thought.

"If he waits until nightfall we're licked," said Jim.

"It will be up to Benson, then," replied Don.

The afternoon dragged until four o'clock, and then Jordan uttered an exclamation. He had his glasses pointed at the cabin.

"Here he comes now," he announced, and the others raised their glasses. Sure enough, a man was wending his way up the slope, straight for the cabin of the cripple, and Jim called their attention to a white package that he had in his hand.

"I think I see his game," cried Jordan. "He probably has medicine in that package and that will give him an excuse to visit the man."

"Look over toward that grove a couple of degrees to your left," said Don. "Benson is down there." A glance through the glasses showed a second figure crouched in some dense bushes, which their elevation rendered perfectly plain.

The clerk stayed in the cabin for an hour and departed at the end of that time. When he had gone Jordan closed his glass.

"That makes the case complete," he announced. "Now we can go back and report to the colonel. Who wants to bet that I don't stay up until taps tonight?"

"Not I," returned Jim, promptly. "I'm so confoundedly sleepy myself that I won't know whether you do or not!"

CHAPTER XXIII

BREAKING UP HYDES' PARTY

THE three cadets enjoyed their sleep that night. Right after supper they entered their tents and lost no time in catching up on the lost necessity. In the morning Benson reported to the camp and they talked things over with the colonel.

"I had a feeling that you fellows were watching me," smiled the scout leader. "But I was keeping a close check on Rose just in case there was some hitch in your program. I kept an eye on that clerk all day. There is a restaurant right across the street from the drug store and I ate in there, taking care to sit where I could look right out of the window. But the clerk didn't come out at any time in the morning and I had to hang around until about three o'clock before I got a chance to trail him. He went up there with a bundle of medicine in his hand, so as to make it look all right."

"There is no doubt now that the supposed cripple is the ghost, and that he is working for this last Maul," mused the colonel. "In due time we'll catch him and deal with him accordingly. But in the

meantime I think I will get ahold of a good private detective and see if we can't have this man Maul located in Crossland. If we merely arrest the paid ghost and don't get the big man higher up we will practically lose the game."

"That is true," nodded Benson. "But you are going to guard your camp well, aren't you?"

"I certainly am," responded the colonel. "Now that we know the man has definite plans for working harm against us we must be well on our guard. In the meantime, Mr. Benson, suppose we let it go at that for the time being? You can keep your eyes and ears open and see if you can find out anything that will help in any way, and we'll do the same here on this end. We are certainly grateful to you for your splendid help so far."

"Don't mention it," begged Benson. "I'm a scout master and am supposed to be a good citizen. Both of us should do our best to run a nuisance like this to earth. I'll see you again soon."

At the evening meal in the mess tent the colonel addressed his corps. "Gentlemen, some time ago we pledged ourselves to run down this ghost business that is troubling the inhabitants of the Ridge and to date we have made quite a bit of progress, even more than most of you know. In due time full details will be related to you, but at present it seems best to keep things quiet. But this much I

wish to tell you: we have learned that this 'ghost' is a hired professional who is planning to wipe out our camp. I do not know just how he proposes to do it, whether by fire or mob violence, but it is planned, and according to the information secured the blow will come soon. I am therefore doubling the number of sentries beginning with tonight, and there will exist the same measure of vigilance from now on that would be in force were we at war and in the country of a hostile army, which, in one sense, we are. I will be very severe with any lapse of discipline, and your orders are to alarm the camp instantly if anything out of the ordinary is seen or heard. The Officers of the Guard will exercise unwavering care and conduct rigid inspection of posts.

"There has been a definite threat against our horses and for that reason I want all our combative intelligence used at this time. We can stand being burned out or chased out, but we cannot stand the mistreatment of our horses. My commission to you is that you now prove to me that you are cadets worthy of the school from which you come."

The colonel resumed his seat and there was a buzz of excitement and indignation. The cadets welcomed the prospect for some actual and dangerous service, and the prospect of a mob fight was especially alluring. But the feeling was that any move made against them would be in the nature of a

stealthy act, and all of the cadets determined to brace themselves for the stern business at hand.

"If any ghost tries to touch the horses I'll shoot him on sight," growled Thompson, who loved the animals.

"All I hope is that they rush the camp with a gang," Terry said. "Wouldn't that be a dandy scrap! Imagine the corps meeting a crowd of roughnecks in a hand-to-hand battle. That would be something to write about!"

"If you were able to write, Red-head," said a cadet nearby.

"Humph, if the battalion couldn't lick any bunch recruited around here we ought to go back to the school and play tennis all the rest of our lives," snorted Terry, who was not good at the racket game, and therefore did not like it.

"I'm afraid that the attack won't be an open one," Don told them. "More likely to be something shady."

"You ought to know, Mercer," said Motley. "Wish I had been on that switchboard the other night."

That night the number of guards was doubled and the greatest care was exercised. The Officers of the Guard visited posts at frequent intervals and checked up on the sentries. But the night went

by without anything out of the ordinary happening. In the morning Benson brought news.

"That ghost showed up in South Plains last night," he reported. "Some farmers saw him over that way. That is some distance from here and the ghost is following orders to the letter. I didn't hear a thing last night, though I listened to every conversation. Tonight he may come back this way. But I don't know whether you will have to fear him or not, for if you'll remember Maul promised to do the job himself."

"We'll be on the lookout for both of them," promised the colonel.

That afternoon was a warm one and the boys went swimming. Terry had developed a slight summer cold and so he did not go. He was sitting in front of the tent on a box whittling a piece of wood industriously. All his life the red-head had loved to carve and whittle, and now he was enjoying himself at the task. The camp was quiet and the shouts of the fellows in the swimming hole drifted to his ears. Terry paid no heed but went on piling the chips up in front of him.

There was a step near him and he looked up. The little Carson boy was approaching down the company street from the direction of the woods and Terry smiled kindly at him. He liked the little farmer boy.

"Hello, young fellow," greeted Terry. "How are you today?"

"All right, Mr. Mackson," smiled the boy. "Why ain't you in swimming?"

"Got a little cold and the company doctor told me to stay out for a while," answered the whittler, gravely. "So I'm doing something to keep my thoughts from wandering. What's on your mind today, anything in particular?"

"I want to tell you something," said Jimmie Carson, sitting down on the edge of the box as Terry made room for him. "You know that old cripple over in the cabin? The man named Vancouver?"

"Yes, I know who he is. Why?"

"Well, what do you think, Mr. Mackson? He isn't a cripple at all!"

Terry stopped his whittling abruptly and looked keenly at Jimmie. "How do you know that?" he demanded.

"I heard the Hydes say so," was the reply. "They are going over there tonight and kill him or something!"

The whittling ceased for good. "The Hydes!" ejaculated Terry. "How did they know?"

"Listen, I was over at Hydes with my father this morning," said the boy, his eyes serious and grave. "While Pop was talking to old man Hyde I heard the sons talking in the barn. They didn't know

that I was right outside on our wagon, and I heard 'em plainly. They said that one of them had seen the cripple sneak into his cabin late last night, and they found out that he wasn't any cripple. Seems that one of the Hydes was driving home from some place and he saw the ghost sneak into the cabin. Then he looked in under a window and saw the ghost get back into his chair, so they knew that old man was playin' ghost. Can you 'magine that, Mr. Mackson?"

"No, I can't," returned Terry, gravely.

"So they said they was going to go to the cabin tonight and just about kill that old man. I thought at first I'd tell Pa, but I was scared to, so I come up here to tell you fellows about it. I don't think that old man ought to be hit by those big bully Hydes, do you?"

"No, sir," said Terry, with emphasis. "Jimmie boy, I'm glad you told me this. Come along to the colonel; we must tell him."

The colonel was keenly interested in the news. "Thank you for telling us this, my boy," he smiled down at the rugged farm boy. "This old man is a wicked fellow to go around scaring people out of their wits, but just as you say he shouldn't be hit by those hulking Hydes. Mr. Mackson, pass the word to the special patrol to be ready to go with me to the cabin as soon as darkness comes tonight."

"Very well, Colonel," said Terry. "I'm glad you are going along, because I feel that this is likely to be a fairly tough situation."

They left the tent and Terry went to hunt up the other boys, first swearing little Jimmie to secrecy. "Don't breath a word of it," he told the boy. "We want to save this old man from a severe beating and we also want to capture him for his part in the business that has been going on around here. So it will be the best thing if you keep very quiet about it."

"I will, Mr. Mackson," promised the lad, eagerly.

The others soon knew what was expected of them. Just before they started out they met in the tent of the colonel.

"Mr. Vench and Mr. Douglas, I want you to start right away for Rideway and get the sheriff," ordered the colonel. "We can't arrest this cripple ourselves, but he must do it. It may be that we shall have trouble with the Hydes, and anyway, the sheriff is always saying that we interfere with his affairs on the Ridge. You may have trouble with the sheriff, but if you do just tell him that your colonel orders him to come to the cabin and that it will be the worse for him if he doesn't come!"

"Very well, sir," Douglas responded, and he and Vench went out.

"We will take side arms with us, gentlemen,"

said the colonel, buckling on a revolver belt. "We won't have to use them, I trust, but at least we'll be prepared."

When the others of the Ghost Patrol had equipped themselves they set out with the colonel for the cabin over the hill. Those in the camp saw them go and much speculation went around as to the purpose of the expedition. The camp itself was in order for any emergency, with double guards posted and the major in charge. Feeling that all would be well in their absence the Ghost Patrol with their vigorous colonel left the encampment and plunged into the darkness of the trees.

Vench and Douglas had obtained a good start and they felt it would not be long before they returned with the sheriff, if that worthy decided to come. The boys wondered at the colonel's threat to compel the sheriff to come to them, but they felt that he would not have made it had he not meant it. So they swung on toward the little cabin at a rapid pace, topping the rise and bearing down on it.

"Somebody's at home," Don said, as they came in sight. "There are lights in the windows."

"Yes, but look! There are the Hydes!" cried Terry, pointing.

Into the patch of light from one of the small windows a burly figure stepped and another joined it. A third, and slimmer figure, proclaimed the

father. There was a word of planning between them and then one of the sons raised his foot and kicked the window deliberately out. With that action he jumped right through the opening and landed in the room. A moment of silence followed and then the front door was opened. Promptly the father and the other son walked in and the door was shut.

"Just in time," proclaimed the colonel, grimly. "Let us hustle, gentlemen."

They ran down the rest of the slope, the doughty colonel in front, and came to the cabin in a short time. The colonel threw himself against the door, which had not been very well secured, and it opened under his impact. Followed by Don, Terry, Jim and Jordan, the colonel shot into the room.

The lamp burned quietly on the table. In one corner crouched the supposed cripple, his face pale and his hands grasping a stout stick. Facing him, with brutal expressions on their surly faces, stood the Hydes. The oldest son held a heavy horsewhip in his hands, and it was evident that he was just going to use it when the cadet party burst in.

At sight of the cadets the expressions on the faces of the men changed. Surprise gave way to eager gladness on the face of the old man and spiteful anger on that of the Hydes. As yet no blow

had fallen and the relief party was in the nick of time.

"What do you want here?" the father said, a snarl in his voice.

"We want that man, for playing the part of a ghost and stampeding our horses," said the colonel evenly. "And we want to see to it that you don't touch that man with your whip. We know that you plan to whip him, and we're here to prevent it."

"You are, heh?" grunted the son with the whip. "You all can have this old man if you want him, but you can't stop us'n from whipping the day-lights out of him. This is the dog that burned our barn down."

"I know all about that," nodded the colonel. "But you won't horsewhip him. You can turn him over to the proper authorities; in fact, I have already sent for the sheriff and he will be here any minute now. But you can't take the law into your own hands, not while we are here, certainly."

"Look here, you soldier captain, or whatever you are!" bellowed the senior Hyde. "You mind your own business. Puttin' this fellow in jail won't do us no good, and we're going to beat the hide off'n him. You keep out. Josh, go ahead and wallop him."

The Hyde boy raised his whip but the colonel reached up, jerked it from his hand and threw it

into a far corner. The Hydes grew red and clenched their fists.

"Let's give them a good beatin', Pa," said the younger son, and he advanced. But the colonel drew his revolver and covered the three of them. The other cadets dropped their hands to the butts of their guns.

"Come a step nearer me and I'll shoot you right through the leg," promised the colonel, simply.

The threat stopped them in their tracks. Sul- lenly they fell back, hatred showing in their dull, heavy faces. The old man whooped faintly.

"That's handling them," he said, stirring eagerly. The colonel looked at him.

"You stay where you are, too, Mr. Vancouver," he said. "We'll have to turn you over to the law for punishment."

"I ain't the only one in this game," blustered the supposed cripple.

"We know all about Mr. Maul," said the colonel. The Hydes snapped to attention.

"Maul!" cried the father, harshly. "Old Maul is dead!"

"Old Maul is very much alive," retorted the colonel. "He is the one who is directing this whole campaign. Did you think this old man was doing it for fun? He has been paid by Maul to keep this

thing going, and he planned to burn you out of your house pretty shortly."

"Then you ought to let us whip this sneaking skunk!" shouted the elder Hyde.

"Brutality won't do any good," returned the headmaster.

"Here comes the sheriff," announced Jordan, as a heavy step was heard outside the door.

The door opened to admit the sheriff, followed by Vench and Douglas. The two cadets looked grave and a trifle angry and the sheriff was his usual blustering self.

"What's going on here?" he roared, looking around. His angry eyes fastened themselves on the colonel. "I hear that you ordered me to come up here. Ordered me! Who are you, sir? I never saw you in my life!"

"I never saw you either," retorted the unmoved colonel. "Perhaps it is no loss on either side. But I have heard a good deal about you and I felt that you might refuse to come, so I sent you the order to get here without fail."

"Very kind of you, I'm sure," sneered the sheriff. "What is the trouble here, anyway?"

The trouble was explained by the colonel, but the sheriff shrugged his shoulders. "I think you would have done well to have minded your own business, sir," said the important official. "This man needs

a sound horsewhipping. If it had been your house he burned you would be the first one to whip him. What am I supposed to do?"

"You will arrest the old man and put him where he will be safe," said the colonel. "As for the Hydes, you can't do anything but send them home."

"Look here, colonel, are you giving me orders!" bellowed the loud sheriff, his face a dull red. "If you are, I won't even listen to them. Where in the name of the president you get the nerve to order me around is more than I can see. I've got half a mind to run you in for pointing a revolver at the Hydes."

"Sheriff," said the colonel, warmly. "I'll tell you what I'm going to do with you. I have quite a bit of influence with the local newspapers, and I'm going to broadcast the full story of your continued opposition to run this ghost to earth. I'm going to let the world know how a ghost terrorized the Ridge here for years, right under your nose, and you never found out who it was. I'm going to relate how my boys discovered the whole thing, and show you up for the stupid, bungling figure-head you are! And if you ever get another job with responsibility to it, I don't know what the people of this county are thinking of!"

There was a total silence in the room while the colonel and the sheriff glared at each other. The

whole frame of the sheriff shook with suppressed rage and his breath came fast. Calmly the colonel looked him straight in the eye. But the sheriff was licked and he knew it.

He turned furiously to the Hydes. "Get out of here and get home," he snarled. "Don't ever let me catch you in any trouble again as long as I'm sheriff on this Ridge! You, Peter Vancouver, come here while I put the handcuffs on you."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LAST OF THE GHOST

THE Hydes had slunk off and were lost in the darkness. The sheriff had handcuffed the bogus cripple and now they were on their way to the local jail in Rideway. After putting the light out the colonel and the members of the Ghost Patrol left the cabin and started over the trail to camp.

"I'm very glad we got there in time to prevent any serious injury to that old man," remarked the colonel, as they walked on. "Did you boys have any trouble with that sheriff?"

"A little bit, sir," Douglas replied. "He made a lot of noise when we explained things to him and when we told him that you ordered him to come up to the cabin he nearly exploded! But he did come finally, though he talked so much and made so much noise on the way up that Vench and I felt like rolling him in the mud!"

"I guess it was about time that somebody talked to him," the colonel said. "The people around here are curious. They haven't made any effort to run down this ghost and they take abuse from this great

blustering sheriff. But I guess this ghost angle of things is about over."

"All that remains now is to catch Maul," Jordan reminded him.

"Yes, and we'll see to it that steps are taken to do that," the headmaster promised.

It was a totally black night, with not a star in sight. A leaden sky threatened rain and the absence of the slice of the moon and the friendly stars made the world below very dark indeed. Fortunately for them the cadets knew the road fairly well, and they approached the camp through the bushes without having altered their course enough to puzzle them.

"We will be hailed in about a moment," said the colonel. They were close to the outpost where the sentry was on duty, and they advanced boldly, waiting for the call.

But none came. They reached the line of patrol that the sentry was supposed to make, but they did not run across the man who should have been walking up and down. In deep bewilderment they stopped.

"This is very queer," murmured the colonel. "What can have happened?"

Terry moved forward and struck his foot against something soft. Without loss of time he dropped

to his knees, feeling before him with his hands. The sharp intake of his breath drew their attention.

"What is it?" the colonel asked, quickly.

"Here is the sentry, tied up tighter than a bundle," was the startling reply. "Something is up around here."

The others clustered around and a match was struck. They found Cadet Innes, the sentry, lying on his back, bound around with coarse but strong cord. He seemed to be all right otherwise, but perfectly speechless with a thick gag in his mouth. By the way his eyes snapped they judged that he had plenty to say. When the grunts of surprise were over they went to work and soon relieved him of the ropes and the gag.

"Be quiet, on your lives, gentlemen!" was his first word, after he had licked his dry lips. "The man who tied me up is in the camp, up to some game."

"Any idea who it was, Mr. Innes?" the colonel whispered.

"No, sir. A man all in black jumped me and did it in a hurry. Muzzled me with one hand and took away my gun with the other. It happened before the Officer of the Guard got around, in fact he is due here now."

"You say the man went toward the camp?" was the colonel's next question.

"Yes, sir, and he carried a can of kerosene with him," was the startling reply. The others wasted not another minute, but jumped to their feet.

"Be very quiet as you approach the camp," ordered the colonel, leading the way through the bushes toward the camp.

They approached silently and looked at the camp. It seemed deserted. Three fires showed up red before the tents, but the cadets were in their beds. On the other side of the camp the Officer of the Guard could be heard as he spoke shortly to a sentry. Otherwise there seemed to be no movement or life in the place.

Don reached over and pulled the colonel's arm. Close to the supply wagons a darker shadow showed, and the faint sound of liquid bubbling out of a can could be heard. All of the hidden watchers caught the significance of it at once and crouched down to wait until the man should have come nearer them.

Then, something happened that changed their plans abruptly.

A match was struck. The flare of the tiny blaze showed a dark face with a hooked nose, coarse hair, and a set, stern face. The man at the supply wagon bent forward with the match.

Cadet Vench was little. He was also fast and happened to be the nearest one to the stooping man. In three strides Vench left the shelter of the trees, sprang into the air, and landed like a monkey on the back of the man, who had started to straighten up at the sound of Vench's steps. They both went down, the match dropped on some oil-soaked cloth, and a fierce blaze jumped up in a twinkling.

As Jim afterward said, he staked all on the size of his feet. He landed with both shoes on the cloth, snuffed the blaze out with a single stroke, and saved the supply wagons and the entire camp.

Now all was action. A sentry nearby had fired the alarm. Vench and the unknown man were staging a furious wrestling match on the ground beside the wagons as the others dashed up and came to his help. Someone threw more fuel on the nearest fire, Major Rhodes ran up with his revolver in hand, and the whole camp, more or less dressed, came running after him. In the new light which the fire showed they saw Vench and the colonel drag the man to his feet.

"Just got you in time" said the colonel, holding the man in a tight grip. "Am I right when I say your name is probably Maul?"

"Yes, my name is Jackson Maul," was the reply, given in a deep voice. He gazed in haughty silence around at the gaping cadets.

"I'll ask you to spend the rest of the night with us in our guard tent, Mr. Maul," said the colonel, his revolver in his hand. "I may as well tell you that your ghost game is up, and the ghost of the Ridge safely in the county jail. I think you'll find yourself in pretty heavy trouble for attempting to fire our camp."

No reply was offered by the man who called himself Maul and they took him away, where a tent could serve as his place of imprisonment. Major Rhodes himself took the responsibility of watching him for the rest of the night. It was some time before the excited cadets went back to their beds. An examination showed them that the camp had been soaked in oil at a number of points, and had fire been applied to any of these places they would have been totally wiped out. It would have been a lucky thing if they had all escaped with their lives had the camp been fired.

On the following morning the man Maul was marched to Rideway and locked in jail with the man he had paid to play ghost. The full story now spread around the town and the Ridge people found out how they had been terrorized for years by the last of the Maul family in his effort to drive the Hydes off of the Ridge. With this capture of the two men the mystery of the ghost of Rustling

Ridge came to an end, and from that time forward the simple country people had nothing more to fear after dark. In time the two men and the clerk Rose were all given prison terms for mischief with malicious intent. The Hydes kept out of trouble from that time forward and the loud sheriff of the Ridge became softer in his speech, at least as long as the cadets were in the neighborhood. A number of the county newspapers gave high praise to the cadets and to Benson, the night telephone operator, for public-spirited duty.

Soon after these events the colonel called Rowen into his tent. He had been very much displeased with the conduct of the cadet, but as he reflected that things had now settled down, it would be wise to forget the whole thing, he felt sure. So he spoke mildly enough to the cadet, but he was surprised when the sulky one flared back at him.

"Never mind, Colonel Morrell, I don't want to talk about anything!" was the astonishing statement. "I'm going home right away. Everything has been pushed against me during this whole encampment and I'm sick of it! I don't want anything more to do with the cadet corps!"

"Very well, Mr. Rowen," returned the colonel, still mildly. "You say everything has been pushed against you. But you would not believe Mercer's

word about the ghost starting the stampede. Now we have the word of the ghost himself that he started it and that Jim called out to him. Then, against orders, you took your revolver with you and shot it off at an improper time. Under those circumstances, do you still feel that you had everything against you on this camping trip?"

"I feel that I have had enough of this school and this trip," said Rowen. "I guess I could have more fun with my own friends in a summer camp where a fellow didn't have to do so much unnecessary work. I'm going home."

Mr. Rowen did go home. No one was really sorry to see him go, for his surly temper had never made him popular in any way.

From that time onward the summer slipped along without unusual incident. It was a delightful and happy vacation, full of swinging action and invigorating fun, and when the time came to break camp all of the boys were feeling the joy of a thoroughly sound and healthy life.

"Back to school and the fun that goes with it," smiled Don, as they struck tents.

"Yes, and our time is getting limited," said Terry, seriously. "We haven't a whole lot more time left to us in our school life."

"You are right there," Jim agreed. "Next year Don will be senior captain of the school."

Before the morning was over the cadet battalion was marching toward the school, leaving Rustling Ridge and its many exciting memories behind them.

THE END

